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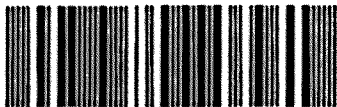
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Young Children's Expressions of Spirituality: An Ethnographic Case Study

Gill Goodliff

Cert Ed (PCET); Advanced Diploma Child Development and Pre-School/Primary
Education; M.A. (Education)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate
in Education (EdD)

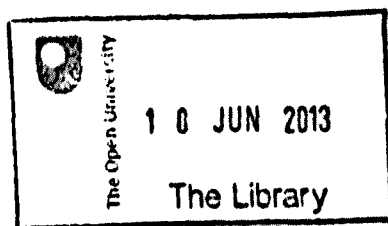
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Abstract

Historically the fostering of children's spirituality or spiritual development has been embedded in English education legislation. The underpinning principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DCSF, 2008), for children from birth to five years, made explicit reference to a spiritual dimension of young children's wellbeing. Yet spirituality receives scant acknowledgement in practice and there is little research focusing on exploring young children's spirituality in pre-school contexts.

Located within an interpretive paradigm, this ethnographic case study of children aged two and three years in a day nursery, explores the language(s) of spiritual expression. A socio-cultural (Vygotsky, 1978) perspective of the child underpins the study that recognizes children's agency (Dahlberg et al., 1999) in constructing meanings about the spiritual through their relationships and participation in everyday activities and interactions. Multi-layered data collection methods for listening to young children were chosen including direct observation, participant and non-participant observation, audio recording and digital photographs. A hermeneutic approach underpins the analysis and interpretation of the data. Findings reveal the multi-dimensional nature of young children's spiritual languages expressed in relational and imaginative spaces through creativity, reflection and embodied meaning making.

This thesis argues for a broader situating of spirituality in English early childhood education that recognises the cross-curricular potential for learning imbued with the spiritual. A model of the multi-dimensional language of spirituality is presented to support practitioners in recognising young children's expressions of the spiritual separate to any association with religion or a belief system.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

'In the upsurge of interest in spiritual development in the United Kingdom ... it is surprising that so little attention has been paid to the 'language' of spirituality'

(Halstead, 2005, p.137, emphasis in original)

1.1 Setting the scene

Over recent years there has been increasing interest in spirituality in Western society (Wright, 2000; King, 2009). Empirical research into spirituality has seen more focused attention paid to investigating the spiritual experiences of children (for example, Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota and Fletcher, 1997; Hay and Nye, 1998; McCreery, 1996; Champagne, 2001, 2003; Hyde, 2005; Bone, 2007, 2008), albeit largely with children over 4 years and, excepting Bone, (2007, 2008), linked to a religious discourse, if only implicitly.

Some argue (for example, Wright, 2000; Bruce, 2002) that this rising interest in spirituality is directly linked to an increasingly secular society, and evidence of the decline in interest and expression of organised religion. Correywright and Swarbrick (2010) comment on the high incidence of academic articles on spirituality in journals for academics and practitioners outside a theological or religious context, and the increasing inter-disciplinary interest in spirituality spanning professional study in, for example, health and social care and education. Reporting on the development and teaching of option modules in children's spirituality within undergraduate degrees in Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies respectively, Correywright and Swarbrick (2010) and Adams (2010) record students' engagement with spirituality as a contested phenomena and engaging in debates such as how spirituality is defined in the context of education.

The observation of Halstead (2005) that introduces this introductory chapter to my thesis highlights to educators that against a backdrop of a rising interest in spirituality there has been a lacuna in discussion and debate about spirituality, at both micro and macro level. Halstead contends that just as subjects such as mathematics have a distinctive language to be understood to access and participate in the discourse of mathematics (p. 137), so spirituality might also have a distinctive language to be learnt or responded to in order to engage in spiritual discourses. One of the major themes of this doctoral thesis is therefore an exploration of the languages that children utilise to give expression to their natural spirituality. Whilst there has been considerable analysis of this language in children aged four or older, this doctoral research takes seriously, for the first time, the challenge within Halstead's (2005) comment above, and attends to the language of spirituality of two and three year olds, who in their everyday lives constantly construct meaning from the situations and experiences they encounter, as this brief vignette perhaps illustrates:

Two year old Amos is watching Kirsty and Kirsten (both three years old) playing in the role-play area of the day nursery they attend. The two girls stand side by side by the cooker and Kirsty puts an object (unseen) on Kirsten's plate. 'There you are!' Kirsty says – both girls are smiling; they laugh aloud together. Without any other apparent stimulus, than observing this activity and exchange between the two older girls, Amos spontaneously skips and jumps in the air. He is smiling.

Through this brief spontaneous physical action I ask a question that will become a thread throughout this thesis: what might Amos be communicating that expresses spirituality or that might be understood as spirituality?

The following discussion explores further the rationale and background to research that attends to the language(s) of spirituality 'spoken' by young children aged two and three years. In Section 1.2 I begin with a personal statement explaining the context and impetus for the study. I discuss how my personal values and beliefs and aspects of my professional biography influenced my interest in the domain of spirituality and the choice of the emerging research questions. The place of spirituality in policy and curriculum frameworks for education and care of young children (aged birth to five) is introduced in Section 1.3 and includes consideration of how spirituality is understood and located in the early years curricula across the United Kingdom. The next section (1.4) contains an account of what was a 'critical moment' in the research journey and discussion of a pre-doctoral study that significantly extended my interest in children's spirituality and impacted on the questions and direction for this doctoral research. The development and articulation of my research question is explained in Section 1.5 and includes the development of a working definition of spirituality adopted at the outset of this research. This introductory chapter concludes (1.6) with a summary overview and an outline of the thesis.

1.2 The impetus for the study – a personal statement

My interest in children's spirituality, and particularly that of very young children, has its origins in both my personal and professional life. I have been a lecturer in early years since 1988 teaching aspects of child development and early years professional practice to diverse groups of adults and 16-19 year olds in community settings, colleges of further education and universities. Previously, in 1976, I qualified as a social worker and over the next decade worked with children aged two to sixteen years old in an urban residential childcare setting, and with babies, toddlers, young

children and their families in two Family Centres within the voluntary sector, situated in London Boroughs.

My interest in young children's spirituality has developed over time. The spiritual development of children was never explicitly discussed during my social work training but it was during this period of training that I first encountered different theories of children's development. Although these included the work of Bruner and Piaget, the emphasis in my training was on theories stemming from the psychoanalytic tradition that emphasises the foundations of emotional development above the cognitive.

In the 1970's and 1980's children in need of the services of social workers were commonly understood as being deprived and likely to come from families who neglected or mistreated them. This dominant and implicit construct of 'problem' families (Cannan, 1992) and damaged, challenging children - that Daniel and Ivatts (1998) argue was perpetuated by the Children Act (HMSO, 1989) - was one that I held for many years. Social work theory and practice, in the decades following the Second World War, Packman (1975, cited in Daniel and Ivatts, 1998), argued, was dominated by a prevailing discourse of the child as a 'victim' of neglect and abuse. The need therefore, to compensate for previous, perceived deprivation and neglect, led to a strong emphasis, throughout my social work training, on children's emotional development.

The importance of play, and particularly its therapeutic value - drawing on theories and therapeutic discourses within the psychodynamic domain (Axline, 1964; Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Erikson, 1965, Winnicott, 1971) - in enabling children to make sense of the world was also stressed and emphasised in residential social work practice.

Erikson (1965) argues that imaginative play offers the child agentive experiences, a

place to practice being in control 'in an intermediate reality between phantasy and actuality' (p.204). 'Phantasy', defined by Erikson as being the unconscious processes of the mind – and distinct from 'fantasy' that occurs for example, in a daydream – is an inner place in the child's being. Revisiting this view of imaginative play during this doctoral research I found myself reflecting on whether the imagination might be a place where young children may express aspects of spirituality.

The therapeutic value of play for children whose early emotional development has been impaired, as documented, for example, in the work of Dockar-Drysdale (1968), impacted on my understanding of the importance of relationships in developing a sense of identity and belonging. Reading the work of Winnicott (1971) introduced me to the concept and importance of children's 'transitional objects' created to support the child 'in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott, 1971, p.2). Influenced by the work of the child analyst, Melanie Klein, Winnicott asserted the importance of the inner world (Phillips, 1988) and the central role of imagination for understanding young children's capacities for creativity in play that both creates a bridge between young children's 'inner or personal psychic reality and the actual world in which the individual lives' (Winnicott, 1971, p.7). Children's imaginative play, therefore, creates a transitional or potential space (ibid, p.4) between the child and the environment. As a psychoanalyst Winnicott proposed that this 'potential space' is dependent on relational experiences that lead to trust. Of interest to this thesis exploring young children's expression of spirituality, and discussed further in Chapter 2, is Winnicott's view that the potential space of imaginative play 'can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living' (Winnicott, 1971, p.6).

From the therapeutic paradigm the revelation of the significance of children's inner worlds to their healthy emotional development influenced my work with children 'in care' at that time and has remained a strongly held belief. The deficit view of the child, I had previously held, as a victim and a passive participant in interactions, moved to one that recognizes children as social and active participants (James and Prout, 1997). Children have their own individual agency and are creators and co-constructors of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990). They contribute to, and receive from, the relationships and interactions that they experience within their family and the wider community, (including a place of worship for example, or pre-school setting) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Reflecting this shift in my values and beliefs about the child and childhood, a socio-cultural perspective therefore influenced the theoretical framing of this doctoral research study. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

As a parent of three children below the age of ten years, between 1980 and 1996, I was aware of valuing their inner worlds and wanting to nurture awareness of the transcendent (wondering) in their experiences. I believed that attending to this inner world, and valuing the transcendent in their experiences, was a means of nurturing this spiritual dimension within their lives. Similarly, Hart (2003) writes that it was his role as a father that deepened his interest in spirituality and led to an understanding of what he calls the 'secret spiritual world of children' (Hart, 2003 p.1). Shared experiences with my own children of moments of wonder in stopping and staring at the world, or the appreciation and delight in the mastery of new skills or concepts were important. Spaces for children to ponder and 'to be' are, to me, an essential feature of environments with the potential to nurture children's spirituality. In using the term 'spaces' I adopt the understanding proposed by Moss and Petrie (2002) who challenge the notion of 'children's services' where provisions are associated with producing

'...pre-determined and adult-defined outcomes' (p.9), to instead think about 'children's spaces ... environments of many possibilities – cultural and social, but also economic, political, ethical, aesthetic, physical' (p.9). Such 'spaces' go beyond the physical, they are social and cultural and allow for, and foster, relationships and the creation of values and rights; they are also 'discursive,' accommodating different types of expression, dialogue and reflection, thus where children's voices can be listened to and heard (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p.9). To Moss and Petrie's (2002) list of possibilities, I also add spiritual possibilities, where adults who work with young children might attend to the potential of children's spaces to reveal their languages of spirituality. According to Silin (2005), an early childhood teacher in New York, in the noisy and frantic world of 21st century society, '...where speed and change are valued over reflection and continuity... [S]ilence invites the spiritual to present itself in the classroom' (p.94). Spaces to experience silence create opportunities for inner dialogue, where thoughts and the imagination, that can nurture a child's spirit (Hart, 2003; Hyde, 2008; Adams et al., 2008), may be released in daydreams or stories.

1.2.1 Personal view on spirituality

For me spirituality is fundamental to being human. As a Christian and holding to a theistic and orthodox Christian world-view, I believe that each child is made *in the image of God*. My spirituality is therefore associated with religious belief, based on personal faith in God and expressed through belonging to a faith community that worships in the non-conformist tradition. Although for me spirituality is therefore linked to religious belief, in common with other practitioners and researchers (see for example Crompton, 1998, Dowling, 2005, Adams et al., 2008) the position adopted in this study is that spirituality is not synonymous with religion, but rather, is an attribute of all humanity (King, 2009). Citing the assertion of Hardy (1966) that 'spiritual

awareness' is innate in all human beings, Hay (2006) states: 'On Hardy's thesis, spirituality is not the exclusive property of any one religion, or for that matter religion in general (ibid, p.23).' To adopt that view, Hay further argues, '...implies that there is in every child a spiritual potentiality, no matter what the child's cultural context may be (Hay, 2006, p.60). In a predominantly secularised western and post-modern culture, (Brown, 2001; Bruce, 2002) such as that in England, some argue (Hay, 1998; Adams et al., 2008) that the historic linking of spirituality to the Christian religion in policy documents creates difficulties in implementing these requirements in schools (Hay, 2006). This might be because UK culture is more secular and one that now includes a variety of religions and assumptions (Bigger and Brown, 1999).

The position adopted in this doctoral research, therefore, is that there is a capacity, or the potential, for spirituality within each child. It is part of a holistic understanding of development. I believe spirituality is an attribute of all humanity and argue that children are therefore spiritual beings. Children's agency or power to influence meaning making does, I assert, include expressions or 'languages' of spirituality as they participate in reciprocal relationships with adults and peers (see Chapter 2).

My personal convictions and professional experiences as a social worker and, since 1988, a lecturer and researcher in early years, have influenced the attitudes, values and beliefs I hold about the notion of young children's spirituality. I bring these to this research study and have 'interrogated' their influence throughout the research process.

1.3 Spirituality and the education and care of young children: policy perspectives

Historically the fostering of children's spirituality or spiritual development has been embedded in British care and education legislation (see for instance The Education

Reform Act (HMSO, 1988); The Children Act (HMSO, 1989). The Education Reform Act, for example, stated that schools were required to provide for the spiritual development of children alongside moral, cultural, mental and physical development. The 1992 Education (Schools) Act (HMSO, 1992) additionally placed children's 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' development in the inspection framework. Each of the above Acts applies to each nation within the United Kingdom but, as discussed in the following section, the beginning of political devolution in 1998 has led to differentiation in how spirituality is articulated in early childhood curricula across the nations.

As I began this doctoral research in 2007, with its initial focus to 'investigate young children's spiritual development and its implications for the curriculum in early years settings', England was in a period of transition in its statutory curriculum guidance for practitioners working with children between birth and age 5 years. The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) specified the principles and learning outcomes for children aged 3 years to 5 years whilst the *Birth to Three Matters* framework (DfES, 2002) framed the key developmental principles to support practitioners working with babies and toddlers (birth to three). In September 2008, the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) framework (DCSF, 2008) was introduced for all registered settings providing care and education for babies and young children from birth to 5 years. Central to the then government's ten year childcare strategy (HM Treasury, 2004) to give all children the best start in life, and enforced in the Childcare Act 2006 (OPSI, 2006), the EYFS framework combined *Birth to Three Matters* (DfES, 2002), the *Curriculum Guidance* (QCA, 2000) and also incorporated the *National Standards for Daycare for children 0-8 years* (DfES, 2003). Underpinning the principles of the EYFS was the aim to help all young children to achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes of staying safe, being healthy,

enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being (DCSF, 2008).

The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) required that alongside other related goals, practitioners ‘...give particular attention to: planning activities that promote emotional, moral, spiritual and social development alongside intellectual development’ (p.28) yet the detailed guidance to practitioners failed to exemplify ‘spiritual development’. Spiritual development or spirituality was not mentioned in the components of the four Aspects of the *Birth to Three Matters* framework (DfES, 2002) – A Strong Child, A Skilful Communicator, A Competent Learner and A Healthy Child. However both this framework and the *Curriculum Guidance* were underpinned by the principle that young children’s development and learning is holistic. A systematic background review of literature (David et al., 2003) - commissioned to underpin the *Birth to Three Matters* Framework (DfES, 2002) and targeting practitioners working with babies and young children (David et al., 2005) - explored the development of children from birth to three years. Encompassing research from a range of disciplines, this review (David et al., 2005) highlighted the need for more research into the lives and experiences of toddlers in early childhood education and care settings, and identified gaps - through links with another related review (BERA Early Years SIG 2003) - that included ‘the relative lack of research into young children’s learning in ...spiritual and moral education in early childhood education and care settings...’ (David et al., 2005 p.52).

Arguably, the EYFS framework (DCSF, 2008) added more explicit reference to a spiritual element to holistic development than the *Curriculum Guidance* (QCA, 2000), recognising within one of the four EYFS underpinning guiding principles - ‘a Unique Child’ (DCSF, 2008, p.8) - a spiritual dimension to children’s development, health

and well-being (see Appendix 1). Regardless of explicit references to the importance of the 'spiritual' to children's holistic development, there remained in the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) framework, in common with the earlier *Curriculum Guidance* (QCA, 2000) and *Birth to Three Matters Framework* (DfES, 2002), no rationale for the inclusion of 'spiritual' as an aspect of babies' and children's development, nor exemplification of the notion or meaning of 'spiritual well-being' within the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) guidance to practitioners. This latter notion of 'spiritual well-being' is a focus of discussion in Chapter 2.

A change of government in England in 2010 led to a review of the EYFS (Tickell, 2011) with publication of a revised Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012) becoming mandatory for all early years providers from September 2012. The four guiding principles for shaping practice of the previous EYFS (DCSF, 2008), the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development (in different ways and at different rates), have been retained (DfE, 2012, p.3), but the articulation in the non-statutory guidance material to practitioners (Early Education, 2012) no longer explicitly acknowledges a spiritual dimension within children's holistic development. All empirical data for this research were collected prior to the review of the EYFS (Tickell, 2011). It was, therefore, the original EYFS (DCSF, 2008) framework that informed and shaped the design of the study, (see Chapter 3), and the fieldwork experience, including dialogue with practitioners.

Discussion of the omission of reference to spirituality or spiritual development in the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012) statutory framework and non-statutory guidance, and implications for children and practitioners are included in Chapter 6 with recommendations for further research. This doctoral study was undertaken in England

and before returning to contextualise other influences on my research journey, a brief consideration follows of the ways spirituality and spiritual development is now articulated in the early childhood curricula of the other countries of the United Kingdom.

1.3.1 Spirituality in early childhood curricula across the United Kingdom

Since 1998, following the political devolution of government powers in the United Kingdom, policy for early education and care has been initiated and developed more distinctly by the four nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) curriculum framework, for children from birth to five years, and reformed EYFS (DfE, 2012), situates spirituality as fundamental to a holistic understanding of children's uniqueness, locating its potential in terms of their personal, social and emotional (PSE) development, health and wellbeing. The Pre-birth to Three guidance, (LTS, 2010) and Curriculum for Excellence (LTS, 2009) for children 3-19 in Scotland, similarly situates the spiritual within a holistic framework of rights to health and wellbeing for all. The draft Northern Ireland Early Years (0-6) Strategy (CCEA, 2006, p.3) includes the spiritual domain alongside cognitive, social, cultural, physical and emotional, as one of the six domains of child development within which young children's learning takes place. However, in Wales, situated less than one hundred miles to the west of the English location of this doctoral study, the Foundation Phase Framework, for children 3-7 years (DCELLS, 2008) identifies to practitioners - within the area of 'Moral and Spiritual development' - the potential for a spiritual dimension specifying requirements for children to have opportunities to question, reflect and express feelings and ideas in creative and imaginative ways.

In summary then, policy for each nation of the UK has acknowledged a spiritual dimension to young children's development, but its potential is most often located solely within a discourse of personal, social and emotional development with the emphasis on health and wellbeing. Only the Welsh framework (DCELLS, 2008), the development of which was explicitly influenced by the philosophy and pedagogy of Reggio Emilia in Italy (discussed in Chapter 2), points to a wider discourse for the potential of the spiritual to be mediated in young children's creativity i.e. through questioning, reflecting and imagining. The relevance of the potential of this broader situating of spirituality in the curriculum is explored further in Chapter 2.

1.4 Influences on the focus of the doctoral research

I turn now to discuss two significant events in my research journey (see Table 1), both of which influenced the focus of this doctoral thesis and the development of its research questions. The first is a 'critical moment' (Woods, 1998, p.44) that occurred during a Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) conference (attended in 2006) for providers of education and training for early years practitioners, and the second, is the findings from a small-scale study (Goodliff, 2006) – commenced in 2005 - that explored practitioners' understandings of young children's spirituality.

Year	Research activity/point in research journey
2006	Critical moment
2005 - 2006	Pre-doctoral small-scale study (Goodliff, 2006) to explore how spirituality is conceptualised by adults working with children under the age of five in day nurseries and pre-school playgroups
2007	Doctoral study commenced

2008	Doctoral pilot study
2009	Doctoral study empirical data collection

Table 1 - My own research journey in relation to spirituality in the early years

1.4.1 A critical moment

At a regional Primary National Strategy conference to enable HE and FE training providers to learn more about the impending new curriculum framework for early years, participants were introduced to the draft EYFS framework (DfES, 2006) and invited to discuss the contents in groups. In the plenary session, following these small-group discussions, a comment was made from a HE colleague that children's spiritual development seemed to be missing. The public response to this by the person chairing the session – who was a key contributor to the draft EYFS framework - was: 'Oh! Have we missed out awe and wonder? Do you know we had two guinea pigs once and we called them Awe and Wonder'... This response was greeted with laughter from the assembled audience, no further discussion followed and the subject was changed, implying (at least to my mind) it was of little importance or significance.

The dismissive nature of the response, and lack of debate, irritated me, since the question had been shared and supported in the small group in which I had participated. Whilst Wright (2000) argues that there has been a growing interest in spirituality in the Western world, this incident illustrated how words such as *spiritual* or *sacred* can be treated with mild amusement often because of embarrassment or unease (Abbs, 2003, p.29). The timing of this 'critical moment' (Woods, 1998) coincided with early analysis of data from my pre-doctoral study (Goodliff, 2006) – see 1.5 below - which had begun to reveal a lack of shared understanding about spirituality on the part of

practitioners and the perception of 'mixed messages' about children's spirituality in curriculum documentation and from early years inspectors. This 'critical moment', then, renewed my conviction of the value of the spiritual in young children's learning and development and became a provocation to pursue doctoral research in this area. Together, this incident and the findings from my pre-doctoral research, presented below, became a springboard for the focus of my doctoral research and the research question.

1.4.2 Findings from Pre-doctoral research study

As previously discussed, my interest in young children's spirituality and the acknowledged lack of research into young children's spiritual development in early childhood education and care settings (David et al., 2005), led to an earlier small-scale study (Goodliff, 2006) that explored how spirituality was conceptualised by adults working with young children in day nurseries and pre-school playgroups. The research question in my pre-doctoral study, addressed to early years practitioners, was 'what is your understanding of young children's spirituality/spiritual development?' Data were collected from a purposive sample of thirty practitioners from nine different settings using anonymous questionnaires which generated a sample of ten semi-structured individual interviews (seven undertaken face to face and three by telephone). In this section, only the findings from this study are presented, but a full account of the rationale and methodology – ethics, data collection and analysis - of the pre-doctoral research is included as Appendix 2.

Summary of key findings

Analysis of data revealed that the majority (27 out of 30) of the practitioners surveyed thought that spirituality/spiritual development is *not* 'only for children growing up in families with a religious belief'. However, when probed in interview, a more confused

position emerged suggesting that for most of these practitioners spirituality was indeed linked to religion or religious belief: a position compounded, it appeared, by wording in the curriculum guidance (QCA, 2000), set out earlier in section 1.2, requiring practitioners to plan activities that promoted spiritual development; and a lack of clear articulation by OFSTED inspectors of how they judged whether children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was being fostered appropriately.

Spirituality was understood as connected to young children's emotional development. In interviews practitioners referred explicitly to their relationships with the children, relationships with each other, and the day-to-day practice in their setting. In conversation the majority of the practitioners mostly linked an understanding of children's spirituality/wellbeing with feelings of warmth, happiness and the need for young children to enjoy themselves. Other definitions of spirituality strongly associated with the practitioners' understandings of spirituality were 'awe and wonder', 'creativity' and 'moral development'. Yet, when probed in interview, few of the interviewees were able to suggest how these might be evidenced in children's lives and/or experiences in the setting. In summary, the findings from this previous research study (Goodliff, 2006), suggested that there was no shared understanding, or agreed definition, of spirituality or of its expression in the lives of young children. The early years practitioners held different perspectives on spirituality, and the guidance in policy contained no exemplification.

1.5 The doctoral study research question

Reflection on these findings, and the associated review of the literature for this earlier study, offered a platform for my doctoral research. Although the ambiguity in

education policy relating to definitions of spirituality remained a concern, it became evident there was: i) a lack of empirical research in relation to young children's spirituality in early childhood education and care settings and, ii) that the more urgent focus was to listen to the child in order to discover what young children reveal about, or how they express, the spiritual dimension of their lives – in other words to attend to their language(s) of spirituality (Adams, 2009).

Although much more is understood about the spirituality of children over four years of age, there is less known about how very young children create and express dimensions of the spiritual. Only a few studies have focused on how pre-school children, aged 3-5 years, experience, or express spirituality (see for example McCreery, 1996; Champagne, 2003; Bone, 2007) and there are none known in the UK focusing on children under 3 years, the age group of participants in this study. The aim of this doctoral study, then, is to reveal how young children express spirituality and my revised research question became: *How do two and three year old children express spirituality?*

Adopting a socio-cultural stance based on meanings and learning being situated through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990), means that pedagogical concerns remain a part of my enquiry. This will be explored further in the review of the literature (Chapter 2) but briefly at this point, the main focus in my doctoral study is the child rather than the practitioner: the child as a social being in the context of a day care setting. The social and cultural contexts of children's relationships – between adults and children and between children and children - within different environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) will be explored. An implicit additional question to my study therefore seemed to be: *How might a socio-cultural perspective illuminate how the*

spirituality of two and three year old children can be recognized and supported by practitioners?

1.5.1 Working definition of spirituality

Ratcliff and Nye (2006) assert it is important for researchers of spirituality to articulate their own definition of this phenomenon. As discussed previously, (Section 1.2.1), although for me spirituality is linked to religious belief and a Christian worldview, in common with other practitioners (Crompton, 1998, Dowling, 2005) the position I take is that spirituality is an attribute of all humanity (King, 2009). I argue that children are therefore spiritual beings and spirituality and spiritual expression are not necessarily associated with religion. This thesis is premised on a construct of spirituality as ubiquitous: fundamental to human experience and on the assertion that children have a natural capacity for spirituality (Hay and Nye, 1998). Spirituality from this perspective is therefore distinct from both a developmental stance (see for example, Fowler, 1981) that views spirituality as an element of cognitive development, and a socio-religious view that limits spirituality to a specific religious outlook (Hay, 2006). The working definition I developed for this study is *Spirituality is an aspect of humanity common to all persons throughout every stage of their life and is located in the potential of every child to relate to and make sense of questions of ultimate significance.*

By exploring a particularly abstract concept, such as spirituality, with very young children, this thesis seeks to advance knowledge in an area that is under-researched. As fully explained and discussed in Chapter 3, a qualitative methodological approach (Ely et al., 1991) was taken in this research study.. An ethnographic case study (Yin, 1994), based in a private day nursery, was developed in order to investigate the phenomenon of spirituality and its expression by two and three year old children in

their day-to-day activities and interactions. The development of an innovative methodology strengthens the potential contribution to knowledge and practical application.

1.6 Summary of Introduction and Outline of the thesis

In Chapter 1 the aim and rationale for this study has been introduced and explored. By way of background a personal statement (1.2) explains the context and impetus for the study and sets out how my professional biography and personal values and beliefs influenced my interest in young children's spirituality, the emerging research questions and the socio-cultural perspective on childhood that underpins the theoretical framing of my doctoral research. Policy perspectives on spirituality in legislation and early childhood curricula were examined in Section 1.3 and provide the wider education and care context to this thesis. Different aspects of my research journey were reviewed in Section 1.4 and their impact and influence on the development of this doctoral study discussed in preparation for articulation in Section 1.5 of the research questions and the working definition of spirituality adopted at the outset of the study.

1.6.1 Outline of thesis

In Chapter 2, the Literature Review, literature pertaining to the socio-cultural theoretical framing of the study is first examined. Later sections explore selected literature related to the wider social context, definitions of spirituality in English education policy and examination and analysis of empirical research into children's spirituality.

In Chapter 3, the Methodology, I outline and justify the research design and methodological approach developed in order to investigate how young children

express spirituality. The ethical procedures and guidelines followed in this study involving research with children are explained together with how I gained consent and assent from all participants. Consideration of the potentially sensitive nature of the research topic is also covered.

In Chapter 4, following a description of the hermeneutic analytical approach adopted in this study, the data are presented and analysed through hermeneutic interpretive reflection. The last section of this chapter provides an overview of the findings from the study. These findings are then discussed and synthesised in Chapter 5.

In the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6, a summary of the main findings is presented together with discussion of their contribution to understanding. Practical suggestions for practitioners are outlined together with evaluation of the methodology. Finally, implications for policy and pedagogy are considered together with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review - Locating childhood and spirituality

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the literature pertaining to childhood and spirituality.

Drawing on pertinent selected literature, each section of this review provides the context for discussion of spirituality from various perspectives related to the focus of this study exploring young children's spirituality in a day-care setting.

In Section 2.2 I start with discussion of the literature related to a socio-cultural view of the child and childhood which underpins this study, together with analysis of the relevance of two distinct theoretical frameworks for exploring how young children express spirituality. The wider social context for this study is considered in Section 2.3; I explore the terrain pertaining to religion and spirituality and the backdrop of an increasingly secular society. The impact of biological and neuro-physiological research on an epistemology of young children's spirituality is also briefly explored. In Section 2.4, I turn to discussion of definitions of spirituality, including descriptions and definitions articulated within the English education policy, pedagogy and regulatory context.

This is followed in Section 2.5 by examination and analysis of empirical research into children's spirituality. The influence of the theoretical framing and findings from these studies on my study is discussed and gaps in the literature identified. A summary of the literature review in Section 2.6 concludes the chapter.

2.2 Perspective on the child and childhood

This doctoral study investigates *how young children, aged two and three years, express spirituality in a day nursery*. In order to understand this dimension of children's lives in the social situation of the day nursery a socio-cultural view of the child and childhood, drawing on the work of Russian psychologist Vygotsky, is taken that recognizes that the children themselves are cultural and active participants in society and in their lives (Vygotsky, 1978). This stance reflects the previously discussed (1.2) shift in my own construction of the child and childhood. From that characterized by modernist perspectives, (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999), of the child as a passive rather than an active participant in the world, and childhood being the period of preparation for adulthood, to one which sees childhood as socially constructed and contextualized according to the historical (time and place) and cultural environment.

Vygotsky (1978) argued children use everyday cultural tools, such as paint-brushes or dolls, in their imaginative play and creative endeavours with peers, within their communities, to mediate their learning, and to construct meaning. For Vygotsky, mediation, particularly through oral language, holds the key to transforming the child's understanding and meaning making. He views learning and development as working together in dialogue. His concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children's learning is supported and extended through interactions with more knowledgeable and experienced adults or peers, has been particularly influential in informing and evaluating pedagogical approaches in early childhood settings.

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that new learning is internalized at two levels. Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: 'first on the social level, and later on the individual level: first between people (interpsychologically) and then inside the

child (intrapsychologically)...’ (ibid, p.57). The interpersonal plane - the social level - occurs as children encounter new concepts in social contexts. For example through dialogue with an adult during a meal-time or the interactions between peers during imaginative role-play. Each child brings to the experience prior learning or knowledge and through the mediation of interactions together new knowledge starts to exist. The intrapersonal plane or process of internal dialogue occurs later when this new knowledge is internalized. Language, spoken and unspoken, Vygotsky argued, is critically important in developing a mode of deep thinking and reflective consciousness to which expressions of creativity, and perhaps spirituality (Nye, 1996), are tangible outcomes. I argue therefore that expressions of spirituality thus become a cultural tool for meaning making and for negotiating and constructing identity and Vygotsky’s ZPD becomes a space within which the spiritual may be recognised (Myers, 1997).

Rogoff’s (1990) concept of guided participation in cultural activities, based on her cross-cultural observations of adults and children, built on Vygotsky’s ZPD, articulates the varied ways children initiate learning through observation and participation. Rogoff (ibid) emphasizes how children construct their own meaning making and learning through the process of active participation: children exercise their own individual agency in the process of participation with others. She argues that ‘mutual understanding occurs *between* people in interaction;’ (Rogoff, 2003, p.285). Lave and Wenger (1992) extend this argument by stating that thinking and learning is situated in participation within ‘communities of practice’ where ‘it [learning] is mediated by differences of perspective amongst co-participants.’ (ibid, p.15) Participation, they posit, is central to the formation of identity. Wenger (1998) further asserts that all practice is about meaning as experienced in the activities of everyday life.

The construct of the child as an active participant and 'co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture' (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.48) challenges other dominant constructions of childhood that view the activities of childhood as preparation for the tasks of adulthood. Influenced by Piaget's theory of stages of cognitive development, developmental theories construct the child as an individual whose natural biological development passes through recognized stages. Piaget's child is viewed as an active learner but whose ability to think and perceive the world is constrained by stage of development (Wood, 1998). A consequence of this latter construction in early childhood is to view children in terms of their progress in discrete areas of development, for example physical development or intellectual development so that the dominant discourse is the child who is 'becoming' rather than 'being' (James and Prout, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). This is evident in policy by the high value placed, for example in the EYFS (DfE, 2012), on the early acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills - that are measurable and necessary for later success - at the expense of areas of the curriculum related to fostering imagination for example, often referred to as 'hidden', where the spiritual might be assumed to be located (Priestley, 2005).

As considered later in this chapter, it is the discourse of *becoming* associated with a construct of the child in terms of developmental progress, which is foregrounded in both the original and revised *Early Years Foundation Stage* framework (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012), and underpins a perspective (e.g. Fowler, 1981) on stages in children's spiritual or faith development.

In the next section I introduce two theoretical approaches that acknowledge and empower the contribution of the child to the relationships and activities they participate in and which have influenced the wider theoretical framing of my research.

2.2.1 Socio-cultural approaches to understanding children's spirituality

As discussed in the previous section, taking a socio-cultural perspective on the child recognises the active participation and agency of children in constructing meanings in the communities they inhabit. In this study exploring how young children express spirituality, while the focus will be on the children's participation in their actions and interactions while attending the day nursery, the construction of meaning recognised in that context will be shaped and influenced by the cultural experiences each child brings to the nursery. Discussed first, is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological or systems theory, which recognises the importance of the relationships and interactions in the different environments that the children inhabit and encounter.

2.2.1.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory

The holistic approach to children's development and learning of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human systems theory reflects how participation in different and increasingly complex environments impacts on children's experiences within each one and offers a helpful lens for considering children's spirituality. The reciprocal relationships and interactions that children encounter within each layer, or environment, as they grow up - for example with their family, the local community, place of worship or pre-school setting - illustrate how they are directly and indirectly influenced by the dominant values and beliefs in each environment (Penn, 2005) but also how they bring influence from their personal experiences.

The 'bi-directional' and reciprocal influences occurring in each layer of children's intersecting environments, highlights the child's contribution to the meaning making process and facilitates a shift in the perceived balance of power between the adult and the child. Thus, as David (1998), citing Bronfenbrenner, argues, each child's unique 'ecological niche', is influenced by those around them but the children themselves

also “actively influence their ‘ecological niche’” (David, 1998, p.18). For example, in the research reported here it is acknowledged that the children’s spirituality and spiritual expression in the nursery is shaped by their personal history (Holland et al., 1998) and experiences but also that it actively contributes to understanding and meaning making situated in the nursery. The value of Bronfenbrenner’s approach in studying the settings in which children are directly involved, and exploring how children make transitions among the different environments is acknowledged by Rogoff (2003). However she cautions that the way Bronfenbrenner separates settings ‘into nested systems constrains ideas of the relations between individual and cultural processes’ (ibid, p.48). As stated above, in this study the focus is not on the individual environments that children inhabit, and are influenced by, but is on the agency children bring and spiritual expression they create that reflects the relations between their identity and experiences and thus intersects their different environments.

I turn now to discuss the Reggio Emilia philosophy and pedagogy developed by Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 1993; Rinaldi, 2005) which provides a helpful second theoretical framework for considering and recognizing young children’s expressions of spirituality. The rationale for this lies in the socio-cultural pedagogical principles proposed in Reggio theory, that not only emphasises the influence of reciprocal relationships and communication between peers and adults in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning making, also seen in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory, but also collaboration and negotiation.

2.2.1.2 Reggio Emilia philosophy and pedagogy

The socio-cultural pedagogical principles that underpin practice in the municipal nurseries and pre-schools of Reggio Emilia - a city in northern Italy - have been influential in the UK over the last two decades in challenging and changing views of

children and childhood (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Clark and Moss, 2001; Clark et al., 2005). As considered previously in Chapter 1, following political devolution of government powers, policy for early education has been developed more distinctly across the UK. In Wales, the Foundation Phase framework (DCELLS, 2008) for children aged three to seven years, drew on international evidence (including Reggio Emilia) to articulate a holistic cross-curricula approach to learning across this age phase. Initial engagement with the Reggio approach, in 2005, through the *Hundred Languages of Children* Reggio Emilia Exhibition, led to research with teachers in Wales using Reggio principles as a lens through which to understand and reflect on their own practice (Maynard and Chicken, 2010, p.29).

The Reggio approach acknowledges the rich potential of each child; in particular the child is viewed as active, strong and powerful (Clark, 2003) and connected to other children and adults (Malaguzzi, 1993). The work of Vygotsky and other philosophers and psychologists influenced the development of the Reggio Emilia philosophy and pedagogy (Mantovani, 2007). A distinguishing metaphor of the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, based on a view of the child as a social being, is the 'pedagogy of relationships and listening' (Rinaldi, 2005, p.19). Aspects of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are also echoed in the following description of the Reggio Emilia 'pedagogy of relationships':

'Children learn by interacting with their environment and actively transforming their relationships with the world of adults, things, events, and, in original ways, their peers. In a sense children participate in constructing their identity and the identity of others.' (Malaguzzi, 1993, cited in Dahlberg et al., 1999, pp.58-59)

The construct of the 'rich child, an active subject with rights and extraordinary potential and born with a hundred languages' (Rinaldi, 2005, p.17) that underpins the philosophy and pedagogy of Reggio Emilia resonates with my understanding of

children's spirituality and the potential for ways it might be meaningfully expressed. Thus for this study premised on a construct of spirituality as fundamental to human experience and on the assertion that children have a natural capacity for spirituality (Hay and Nye, 1998) I argue that it can be meaningfully expressed by young children in different 'languages', and through participation in reciprocal relationships and interactions with adults and peers.

The role of the pedagogues (teachers) in Reggio settings is to establish respectful relationships with young children where through 'listening to life in all its shapes and colours, and ...listen(ing) to others (adults and peers)' (Rinaldi, 2005 p.21) together, the co-construction of meaning reveals the children's many thoughts, questions and interpretations about life. As discussed in Chapter 3, the process of documentation used by pedagogues in the nurseries of Reggio Emilia to make visible the meanings co-constructed between child and child, and child and adult, influenced the choice of a hermeneutic approach to interpretation of data in this study. Since the expression of spirituality contributes to a co-construction of knowledge and meaning linked to a child's sense of personal identity, it seemed vital to explore how spirituality may be expressed and what is revealed to practitioners about identity and meaning making through its expression.

Section 2.2 has set out the socio-cultural theories underpinning this study exploring how two and three year old children express spirituality. Childhood is understood as socially constructed and contextualised and children viewed as cultural and active participants in society and their lives. Through everyday cultural tools children mediate their learning and construct meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory emphasises the value of studying the environments children inhabit and in this thesis reminds the researcher that the

children's expressions of spirituality are shaped by their personal cultural history and experiences (Holland et al., 1998) but also contributes to meaning making in the nursery. The socio-cultural Reggio pedagogy of relationships and listening, based on the view of the child as a social being and born with a hundred languages (Rinaldi, 2005), further extends the theoretical framing to highlight the potential for practitioners to document and interpret how young children's spirituality might be meaningfully expressed.

In my pre-doctoral study (Goodliff, 2006) my focus was on the practitioners' understandings of the children's spirituality and how they fostered spirituality within their environments. The emphasis was on the adult perspective alone. My revised research question for the doctoral study (see 1.5) reflects the change inasmuch as the focus became the child. However, adopting a socio-cultural stance based on meanings and learning being situated through interactions, means that pedagogical concerns remain in my enquiry.

2.3 The spiritual terrain – the wider socio-cultural context

For a study adopting a socio-cultural stance to researching children's expressions of spirituality it is important to consider the wider context of young children's living. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, the dominant beliefs and ideologies of society are situated in his macrosystem (Penn, 2005), the remotest environment to children's lives. Within this section therefore several of the dominant discourses related to understanding of spirituality within the wider cultural context of 21st century Britain are presented; I first explore the secularisation theory and then (2.3.2) consider the impact of neuro-psychological research on an epistemology of young children's

spirituality. A brief consideration is also offered of the anthropological perspective on spirituality that emphasises the universality of a desire to finding meaning to life.

2.3.1 The Secularisation Theory

Whilst there is an acknowledged interest in spirituality in the western world (Wright, 2000) that involves a search for meaning and self-understanding, there is also a concurrent decline in the expression of organized religion. This phenomenon is generally attributed, by sociologists of religion, to the processes of secularisation (Hay, 2006). The secularisation theory is of interest and significance not only because it now goes largely unchallenged, but also an essentially secular society provides the cultural context in which young children's spirituality might be explored divorced from religious practice. Although the meaning of secularisation in Britain in the 21st century is contested (Brown, 2006; Dinham, 2006), Brown (2006) comments on the change in religious certainty during the years between the beginning of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st century. In 1900 Christianity was viewed by British government and other major institutions 'as the only legitimate religion', whereas in 2000, Brown (2006) asserts, such universal certainty was replaced by 'two different dimensions on religion' (p.2). The first emerging from a multi-cultural society that now adhered to a diversity of religious traditions e.g. Judaism, Islam and the New Age, and secondly, 'religion had diminished as an element in everyday identity and culture' (Brown, 2006, p. 2). Christianity as the universally held religious affiliation may have been eclipsed by both multi-faith communities, and a strength of secular belief, but it maintains a powerful cultural backdrop to English society, and continues to be the most widely practised religion in England (Brown, 2006). The secularisation thesis is exemplified by Bruce (2002) who argues that forms of religious organization in Western democracies (e.g. Western Europe and the United

States) reflect the increasing individualism of religious life, derived from the religious controversies of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Bruce documents the loss of an all encompassing religious canopy or overarching religious metanarrative, previously expressed in a universal church and high levels of religious belief. Others (see for example, Berger, 1992; Martin, 2005) question this position on the grounds that Europe is the unusual case in the world and that elsewhere in the global south and USA this is not true, as evidenced by the widespread religious affiliation and practice in those parts of the world.

A further perspective is that of the French sociologist, Hervieu-Legere (1999) (cited in Taylor, 2007) who draws on a concept of memory to discuss religion. She asserts that an awareness of shared memory – generated from shared experiences - is an essential element in building individual and social identity. Referring to the historic faith communities in Europe, (Christianity and Judaism) she identifies first the chain of memory which makes the individual believer a member of a community and second, the tradition (or collective memory) which becomes the basis for the community's existence. She believes that societies in Europe are amnesic societies, incapable of maintaining religious memory. However as these societies lose their memory they open up spaces that only religion can occupy. Into these spaces emerges what may be termed the spiritual or, for the secular person, a 'religion-free spirituality' I argue for in this study. The legitimacy of Hervieu Legere's perspective might be illustrated by the lack of understanding of the topic of my research expressed by the adults working in the nursery where I conducted my empirical research, or their immediate displacement of 'spirituality' by a vague notion of 'religion'.

2.3.2 Neuro-psychological theory

Into this apparent religious vacuum also enters a neuro-psychological or scientific materialistic explanation that sees religion – or a receptivity to believe in something supernatural - as a part of human nature because it is a ‘natural bi-product of the way the human mind works’ (Brooks, 2009, p.31). Emerging research in the west into the activity of the human brain from birth (Gopnik et al., 1999) has led to new understanding of the unique potential for relating and learning present in children from birth. Gopnik et al. (1999) argue that from the beginning it is experiences that change the brain and influence and increase its neural connections. The uniqueness of each brain they assert is because ‘we actually participate in building our own brains, and because each of us has a unique history of experiences...’ (Gopnik et al., p.181). The amazing complexity of how babies process information and actively make sense of experiences and their world is summed up in these researchers’ assertion that ‘babies already see the soul beneath the skin and hear the feeling behind the words’ (ibid, p.146). Detailed examination of the burgeoning literature on the developing brain (for example, Blakemore and Frith, 2005; Goswami, 2008) is beyond the scope of this review but more recently the relationship between the brain systems for emotion and cognition has been described by Geake, 2009 as ‘...one of bi-directional dependency’ (cited in Robson, 2012, p.75). Emotional feelings are powerful and complex and beyond thoughts alone (LeDoux, 2003). What is referred to as aspects of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) or emotional literacy, for example reflecting on and managing one’s own and others’ feelings, empathy, self-awareness, social skills might also mediate the spirit of the child (Erricker, 1999).

One variant on this materialistic hypothesis, and discussed briefly in the next section, is the anthropological perspective. The anthropological approach to the study of spirituality is not dependent on a theistic worldview, or any specific religious

framework (Wright, 1999), but points to a cross-cultural desire to find meaning in life and to understand human experience (Schneiders, 1986).

2.3.4 Anthropological spirituality

In a case study undertaken with the Beng community in West Africa the anthropologist Gottlieb (1998) documents the spiritual lives of Beng babies. The Beng believe in reincarnation and consider infancy the most spiritual time. A period when the babies remain connected to their previous existence in the place Beng adults called 'wrugbe'. Gottlieb (1998) contrasts how in the Western model of infant care meeting physical needs is emphasized, whilst less attention is paid '...to social relational concerns and virtually none to spiritual ones' (ibid, p122). Gottlieb (1998, p.122) further contends that most 'social scientists today continue to assume the irrelevance of early childhood to spirituality'. This assertion of the irrelevance of spirituality would certainly seem to be supported from further review of early years education policy in England, where, as I consider in the next section (2.4.5), young children's spirituality receives little explicit acknowledgment but rather, is implicitly located within a discourse of wellbeing. This case study confirms an imperative for research such as mine, that attends to young children's spirituality by exploring and understanding how it is expressed in a Western, secular context.

In summary, the previous sections of this chapter have explored the broader theoretical framing of this study and its extended socio-cultural context. The next section (2.4) presents a range of definitions of spirituality, focusing on descriptions and definitions articulated within the English education policy, pedagogy and regulatory context and wider discourses drawn from pertinent empirical studies.

2.4 Definitions of spirituality in early years education and care - policy, pedagogy and regulatory context

So what is spirituality and how is it understood in early years education and care? As discussed in Chapter 1, one reason for embarking on this doctoral study stemmed from the absence of a shared discourse on spiritual education and particularly for what it might mean for toddlers in care and education settings (David et al., 2005), when education policy and curriculum guidance makes explicit mention of the necessity to promote children's spiritual development. This section therefore reviews how spirituality is specifically defined and discussed in education policy and guidance and the wider spirituality and education literature.

Spirituality has multiple meanings (Adams et al., 2008) and as a concept remains elusive to definition (Wright, 2000; Eaude, 2005). As Best (2000) puts it '...of all experiences it is the spiritual which it seems, is most resistant to operational definition' (Best, 2000, p.10). Nevertheless, a number of discourses have been proposed in policy statements and by commentators as follows:

2.4.1 Spirituality as a ubiquitous phenomenon:

As previously asserted (1.4) the construct of spirituality adopted in this study is that spirituality is fundamental to human experience and on the assertion that children have a natural capacity for spirituality (Hay and Nye, 1998; Hart, 2003, Adams et al., 2008; Hyde, 2008; King, 2009). While the predominantly religious perspective on spirituality has been eclipsed by the materialist, the existence of this phenomenon remains clear whichever explanation is given. That is, an explanation of the ubiquity of spirituality has moved from one that is theist to one that is materialist, or, that the roots of the phenomenon of spirituality can be found in the explanation given by

evolutionary biologists, (the evolution of the human species), rather than theologians and philosophers. White (1996) cites a humanist perspective on spirituality:

‘Religious believers and Humanists, theists on the one hand, agnostics and atheists on the other, agree on the importance of spirituality, but they interpret it differently. Despite these different interpretations, however, all can agree that the ‘spiritual’ dimension comes from our deepest humanity. It finds expression in aspirations, moral sensibility, creativity, love and friendship, response to natural and human beauty, scientific and artistic endeavour, appreciation and wonder at the natural world, intellectual achievement and physical activity, surmounting suffering and persecution, selfless love, the quest for meaning and for values by which to live.’ (p.34)

Spirituality has been understood in former policy statements for primary and early years provision as ‘fundamental to the human condition, transcending everyday experience and to do with issues of identity, death, and suffering, beauty and evil’ (SCAA, 1995, p.3), which I term ‘questions of ultimacy’. As introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed earlier in this chapter, legislation and curriculum documentation (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012) link ‘spiritual’ to aspects of children’s development (albeit rather vaguely) but ‘spiritual development’ itself is problematic (Eaude, 2003) as it assumes both that a child does develop spiritually and implies some kind of measurable trajectory, from immaturity to maturity, over time; and indeed the meaning of the term ‘spiritual’ remains opaque in policy terms. More helpful in reflecting the ubiquity of the phenomenon of spirituality features in Wright’s (2000) definition: ‘As well as being elusive and mysterious, the spiritual is also *linked to that which is vital, effervescent, dynamic and life-giving*’ Wright (2000, p.7) (my emphasis).

2.4.2 Spirituality as associated with transcendence:

Transcendence derives from the Latin word *transcendere* – to climb over - and describes a process of going over, beyond or through limits or obstacles. For Myers

(1997, p.12) developmental growth is the process of transcendence that occurs as adults relationally interact in hopeful ways with children. A sense of mystery or awe when faced with situations beyond our understanding is another way of thinking about transcendence in children. Drawing on the work of Myers and Myers (1999) amongst others, Rogers and Hill (2002) suggest ‘...spirituality refers to a quality of being fully human that enables us to transcend or move beyond what is known to what we do not yet fully comprehend (p.277). Spirituality thus becomes a term for engaging in meaning making that informs the process of transcendence. As findings from my pre-doctoral study (Goodliff, 2006) revealed (1.4.1), the notion of spirituality as transcendence becomes additionally problematic because spirituality is often associated automatically with religious belief. This collapse of spirituality into issues of religion is an unhelpful confusion on the part of some policymakers and practitioners. Whilst some policy statements do not do this in themselves, others have not been clear. In a policy statement in the early 1990s, the National Curriculum Council defined spiritual development in terms of:

‘beliefs and a person’s capacity to experience a sense of awe and wonder. It is to do with mystery, feelings of transcendence and the search for meaning and purpose in life. Spiritual Development is about self-knowledge, relationships, creativity, feelings and emotions’ (NCC, 1993)

Whilst this particular definition of spirituality embraces experience, response and meaning and emphasizes personal identity, relationships and creativity, the inclusion of the category ‘beliefs’ errs towards confusion. The interpretation of the spiritual dimension as a religious one (‘beliefs’), then, is a leap perhaps made by practitioners and policymakers, reflecting an historical view of education in western culture as associated with Christian religious practice. In predominantly secular Western societies, such as that in the UK (Brown, 2001; Bruce, 2002), while the imperative to

foster children's spirituality is not necessarily a contentious goal, the perceived connections of spirituality with religion (Hay, 1985; Adams et al., 2008) and the traditional linking to Christian religion in education policy creates tensions, particularly for practitioners who are not religious believers, in implementing the requirement in school. Religion and spirituality, I believe, share a history, but I am in agreement with Adams et al., (2008 p.11) who argue that '...spirituality is not a synonym for religion'. It exists and has expression beyond any religious tradition. Asserting the difficulties with much research on children's spirituality because of its focus on 'God-talk', Hay (2006) writes:

'Given that the religious contexts surrounding children today are typically much less explicit than in the past or even absent, in order to uncover the innate spiritual potential children may possess, research needs to take a different direction.' (p.60)

Rather, Hay argues, researchers should focus on the perceptions, awareness and responses of children to ordinary, everyday activities which may act as 'signals of transcendence' (Berger, 1967, p.11), expressions of connection or awe and wonder at worlds beyond the child. Phenix (1975) asserts that all, regardless of age, experience transcendence and not just those called 'religious' or 'spiritual' types (cited in Myers, 1997, p.12). He argues that 'human consciousness is rooted in transcendence, and that the analysis of all human consciousness discloses the reality of transcendence as a fundamental presupposition of the human condition' (Phenix (1975), p.122). He further asserts teachers who embrace transcendence encourage creativity and possibilities. It is this understanding of transcendence as fundamental to human experience, and associated with spirituality as meaning making, rather than religious belief, that I argue is missed in early childhood policy. This thesis seeks to provide a

means by which all the potential languages of young children's spirituality might be recognised.

I turn now to explore definitions of spirituality within early childhood education policy that link spirituality to experience in relationship and creativity. First, spirituality as experienced in relationship:

2.4.3 Spirituality as experienced in relationship

In contrast to the previously discussed (2.4.2) National Curriculum Council definition of spiritual development (NCC, 1993) that emphasised links to relationships, creativity, feelings and emotions a definition of spiritual development in the 1994 handbook for OfSTED inspectors states:

'spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal experience which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, evaluating a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality. 'Spiritual' is not synonymous with 'religious'; all areas of the curriculum may contribute to pupils' spiritual development.' (OfSTED, 1994 p.86)

This definition of spiritual development, Chater (2002) argues, assumes 'spirituality resides in the individual alone' (ibid, p.46) and emphasizes the individualistic culture that emerged in the UK in the late 20th century and pervades today. The definition contains no acknowledgement, as Chater (2002) asserts, that a child's spirituality exists, or is situated or expressed, in relationships with another or within communities. By contrast with understandings of spirituality that are overly individualized, Wright (2000) positions relationships at the centre of his definition of spirituality:

'spirituality is the relationship of the individual, within community and tradition, to that which is – or is perceived to be – of ultimate concern, ultimate value, and ultimate truth, as appropriated through an informed, sensitive and reflective striving for spiritual wisdom'. (Wright, 2000 p.104)

The relational sensitivity and kindness of young children to others has been documented by researchers exploring spiritual experience, (for example Champagne, 2003), but also by those who have documented the everyday activities occurring in pre-school classrooms (for example Paley, 1999; Corsaro, 2003). Based on his ethnographic research with three to five year olds in the United States and Italy, Corsaro (2003) states that to understand the complexity of young children's relationships it is essential to take account of the social context and to '...embrace the situated nature...(p.89) of their friendships. Wright's (2000) definition of spirituality, that also recognises the importance of the socio-cultural context of individuals for mediating spirituality, is one with which I concur; arguing that the interactions and relationships of children with adults and with other children form a context for defining how they perceive themselves, a key dimension of spirituality. In her account of the kindnesses of young children she has so often witnessed, Paley (1999), from a secular perspective, records a conversation in which she is challenged to consider whether such '...spontaneous acts of goodness...' (p.28), might involve spirituality. In the following section the notion of compassion and empathy is considered further in the context of creativity.

2.4.3.1 Humanising creativity and wise creativity

The recent theoretical concepts of creativity in dialogue - 'humanising creativity' (Chappell, 2008), and 'wise creativity' (Craft, Gardner and Claxton, 2008) – also offer potential for a more explicit recognition of spirituality within the discourse of creative learning and teaching. Building on the importance of creativity in relationship (Craft, 2000) and John-Steiner's (2000) argument for collaborative activity, Chappell's (2008) conception of 'humanising creativity' challenges the individualised conceptualisation of creativity (Craft, 2005) in the UK education system. Playful

dialogue observed in classrooms (Wegerif, 2005) and in young children's collaborative play (Craft, McConnon and Matthews, 2012) also demonstrates the value of collaborative creative endeavour. The 'humane framework' that emerged from Chappell's empirical work with children and dance teachers, with its overarching notion of 'communal creativity', has at its heart 'the inter-relationship of individual and collaborative creativity' (2008, p.8) and is guided by, compassion, empathy and alleviation of difficulty. More recently, (Chappell, Craft, Rolfe and Jobbins, 2012), through an exploration of the relationship between creativity and identity in dance education with young people, the concept of humanising creativity (Chappell, 2008) is refined and extended. Focusing on the embodied nature of humanising creativity (i.e. shared creative activity that has its origins within the body), they highlight in the 'embodied process of becoming' (Chappell et al., 2008, p.35), the apparent reciprocal, dialogical (Chappell and Craft, 2011), relationship between the young people's identity and their creativity.

So far we have seen that the predominant discourses of spirituality that emerge within education policy and guidance documents are: identity and relationships, transcendence, creativity, imagination, ultimacy and search for meaning. The following sub-section continues to explore literature from the discourse of creativity with a focus on how the creativity of young children is defined and situated. Potential synergies or connections to spirituality are explored.

2.4.4 Creativity and spirituality

Creativity, like spirituality, has multiple meanings (Claxton, 2006) and finding one definition is problematic (Grainger and Barnes, 2006). If located on a continuum, at

one end would be the 'big c' creativity associated with high achievement in a particular domain such as art or literature (Gardner, 1993; Feldman et al., 1994). At the other end lies 'little c' creativity (Craft, 2002) defined as the everyday resourcefulness linked to personal agency and 'mini-c' creativity (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007), that emphasises the intrapersonal importance of meaning making. Boden (2004) distinguishes between P (psychological) creativity, which 'involves coming up with a surprising, valuable idea new to the person who engenders it even if others have had the idea before' (p.2), - situated near 'little c' creativity (Craft, 2002) and H (historical) creativity linked to the creation or invention of a new idea, located closer to 'big c' creativity. The creativity of young children is most commonly defined as linked to play, particularly play involving the imagination (**imaginative play**) and fantasy (Claxton, 1997); to curiosity, the innate disposition to think creatively and actively explore possibilities (Craft, 2002; 2008) (**exploring possibilities**); and creative activity that connects thought, emotion and action (Bruner, 1996) in representations often (but not always) associated within the arts, e.g. a painting, song or dance, (**expressive and connecting representations**). In this study exploring expressions of young children's spirituality, each of these overlapping discourses of creativity – **imaginative play**, **exploring possibilities** and what might be called '**expressive and connecting representations**' - situated more closely, but not exclusively, to 'little c' (Craft, 2002) and 'mini c' creativity (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007) appear to contain potential synergies with the spiritual dimension of children's lives, as will be seen in later chapters.

2.4.4.1 Imaginative play

Imaginative play offers agentic experiences (Erikson, 1965) to the young child, spaces to pretend and explore possibilities that create a transitional or potential space

between the child and his environment (Winnicott, 1971). Within this space, '...sacred to the individual...' (Winnicott 1971, p.6), the child draws on external experiences and the unique inner world of his imagination to express capacities for creativity and, I argue, spirituality. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), one of the pioneers of play (Bruce, 2004) and early childhood education in the UK and beyond, argued that in play children learn about themselves, the world and their place in it; they operate at the highest level of learning and as such play is '...the most spiritual activity of the child' (Froebel, 1878 cited in Bruce, 2004, p. 132). Paley (2004) documents the imaginative narratives created in the fantasy play of 3-5 year olds, referring to the '...indomitable spirit of fantasy play...' (p.110) through which children are able to '...revise and replay the endless possibilities...' (p.111) from their make-believe images. Other more recent theorists of play (for example, Moyles, 1989; Bruce, 1991; Wood and Attfield, 2005) also highlight the importance of imaginative or pretend play. Further, recent re-analysis of data in Possibility Thinking (PT, see next section) studies, (Cremin, Chappell and Craft, 2012) has revealed a foundational presence of narrative, both child and teacher initiated, shaped by questioning and imagination. The imagination 'is an essential human capacity' (Trotman, 2006, p.2) for creating spaces beyond time and place (Robinson, 2002). Trotman identifies six situated, interrelated and mutually interdependent practices in the imaginative that educators should attend to: the solitary imagination; the contemplative imagination; imaginative correspondence; contributory imagination; imaginative dissonance; and the reciprocal collective imagination. The characteristics of each practice draw on meanings drawn from discourses from the sacred and spiritual, emotional intelligence and empathy, and are helpful in reflecting on understandings of children's expressions of spirituality. Imaginative or fantasy play, alone or with others, provides a context for children to explore and reveal who they

are and 'also who they would like to be.' (Wright, 2011) Being imaginative and entering imaginative worlds is also a way of transcending everyday life, to explore 'mystery' (Hay, 2006 p.72) or to experience a sense of awe and wonder (Champagne, 2001).

2.4.4.2 Exploring possibilities

Young children's search for meaning is situated in their everyday encounters and experiences: they 'live at the limit of their experiences most of the time' (Berryman, 1985 p.126). The essence of transcendence, often associated with spirituality (Hay, 2006), is the sense or awareness of going through, crossing over or moving beyond limitations or obstacles (Myers, 1997) and entering a space of mystery (Hay, 2006) – a 'what if' space.

Acting 'as if' and posing the question 'what if?' in multiple ways is at the heart of understanding children's creativity as Possibility Thinking (PT) (Craft, 2002; Chappell et al. 2008). Findings from research on PT (Burnard et al., 2006; Cremin et al., 2006; Craft et al., 2012) with 3-7 year olds identified eight features of PT within children's agentic engagement in play contexts: posing questions, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, being imaginative, self-determination and intentionality. Inherent in imagining 'as if' and exploring 'what if I?' or 'what if we?' is, I propose, an element of transcendence as children make the transition in thinking, or seeing, something in a new way. A particular category of sensitivity in children, identified as 'potentially spiritual' (Hay and Nye, 2006, p.68), is the awareness of experiencing 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), a state of deep absorption or immersion in creative activity where action and awareness somehow merge within to release a feeling of mastery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.367). For young children not all their experiences of 'flow' in activity linked to PT will necessarily be 'spiritual' moments but I argue

there is the potential for aspects of their spirituality to be mediated within such creative spaces.

2.4.4.3 Expressive and connecting representations

The awareness of being in relationship with something or someone is at the heart of the notion of relational consciousness (Hay and Nye, 1998) that Nye (2006) asserts reflects the core of children's spirituality. Within Bone's (2008) concept of '*everyday spirituality*' (p.265) is an understanding of spirituality as a means of connection. From research in three early childhood settings in New Zealand exploring how young children's (3-6 years) spiritual experiences were supported, Bone proposes that situated within the everyday narratives of young children's lives – such as preparing or sharing food - (Bone et al., 2007) are spaces with potential for interpreting activity and reflection as mediating spirituality.

Creative explorations through the expressive arts, such as music, role play and drawing, enable young children to represent their thinking, feeling and knowing (Bruner, 1986) in ways that tell how they are making meaning of the world. In New Zealand, Fraser and Grootenboer (2004) report teachers' observations that 5-12 year old children's deep engagement in such artistic endeavours seemed to motivate 'moments of spirituality' (p.315) that had a tangible effect on the classroom. The different voices of children's multimodal communication enable them to make '...cognitive, emotional and "spiritual" connections that are key to deep learning' (Wright, 2002, p.1). A key component of the multi-modal and embodied nature of children's creative expression and meaning-making can be understood as somatic knowing (Wright, 2002), which links the body (soma), mind (psyche) and soul (Wright, 2011). The mimicking of the sounds and actions of an object or other person in play illustrates young children's somatic exploration (Young, 2011) and, I argue,

potential space for spiritual expression. Discussing the possibilities for learning offered by musical experience, Duffy (2006) more explicitly acknowledges the potential of music as a conduit for spiritual expression, stating that it 'is a form of communication that is spiritual, emotional and intellectual... music is more fundamental to humans than language' (ibid, p.82). Young (2006, p22) describes how the spontaneous singing by two and three year old children '...was woven into the fabric of their play' and, more recently, proposes that expressive, non-verbal communication is a generative resource for creative imaginative activity (Young, 2011, p.178). Previously I argued that spirituality is an attribute of all humanity: it is a language of being and meaning making, in the same way that many (see for example, Rosen, 2010, Duffy, 2010) argue that elements of creativity are characteristic of being human. Elsewhere Duffy (2006) asserts that 'creativity means connecting the previously unconnected in ways that are new and meaningful to the individual... to make real something that you have imagined' (p. 15).

Although creativity was once recognised as divine inspiration within Greek, Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions (Rhyammar and Brolin, 1999, cited in Craft et al., 2008), in arguably secular western societies it no longer possesses an ethical or values base particularly in education (Craft et al., 2008). In contrast then, to the limited scope of spirituality or a spiritual dimension to children's development and learning within English policy, creativity in education, and the necessity to foster creativity in the curriculum for children across all age phases, has, since the end of the 20th century, become an increasing focus of policy makers (Craft, 2008). Despite a change of policy direction on creativity in education more generally since 2010, creativity, unlike spirituality, has retained a clear place in the early years curriculum. In the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012) creativity, seen as 'being imaginative' is situated in 'Expressive Arts and Design', and the potential of creativity to link to all areas of learning is

further emphasised by 'creating and critical thinking' being additionally articulated as one of three core characteristics of how young children actively engage with the world (DfE, 2012, p. 6). It could therefore be argued that, by contrast, the Welsh early years curriculum, by linking creativity to children's spiritual and moral development (see Chapter 1.3), has not adopted a 'value-neutral position on creativity' (Craft et al., 2008, p.3) evident in the English EYFS.

Before turning to empirical research specifically exploring children's spirituality, this final sub-section in 2.4 examines the origins and implications of the discourse of well-being.

2.4.5 Spirituality and well-being

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1979), ratified by the UK government in 1991, stipulates that all children have the right to have their health and wellbeing promoted by governments. In recent years what might be referred to as a new discourse of 'well-being' has emerged in policies and legislation, most notably (as discussed in the previous chapter) in the *Every Child Matters* outcomes, which underpinned the original Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008). Whilst there is no direct reference to children's *spiritual* well-being in *Every Child Matters*, Watson (2006) argues that it could be seen as addressing the spiritual dimension, as it recognizes values 'often equated with children's spirituality' (Watson, 2006, p.252) such as 'well-being, holism, the whole child and listening to children' (ibid, 252-253). Citing the comments of Hull (1998) on the UN Convention's concern for children's rights to a good standard of living, Watson (2006) argues that *Every Child Matters* could be viewed as addressing the spiritual. Hull (1998, p. 59) states that 'spirituality, we are thus reminded, is not only to do with the "spirit" but with the physical well-being of the child'.

Children's *emotional* well-being has been a consistent area of focus within early childhood for some years. While not synonymous with spiritual wellbeing, aspects of what has been defined as emotional wellbeing might be better situated within a discourse of spirituality. Developing a strong sense of identity and self-esteem are central to emotional wellbeing (Laevers, 1997) and, I would argue, contribute to both emotional and spiritual health with its associated engagement with environments. If one of the goals of early years practice is to foster the overall health of the child, this must include emotional and spiritual health alongside physical development and health. Emotional wellbeing involves essentially a strong sense of personal identity and self-esteem, both of which concern those questions of ultimacy that lie somewhere near the core of early spiritual awareness.

Next, in this penultimate section (2.5) of the chapter, the different approaches and findings from what might be argued are three seminal empirical research studies into children's spirituality are examined. Each undertaken in the late 20th century the researchers reflect different views of understandings of the phenomena of spirituality in children's lives that have influenced the design of later studies including this thesis.

2.5 Empirical studies – children's spirituality

2.5.1 Spiritual Life of Children

Coles' research into children's spirituality published in the seminal work '*The Spiritual Life of Children*' (Coles, 1990), emerged from his reflections on extensive narrative data documenting numerous conversations he had with children aged 6-13 from a variety of countries and cultures. The children came from various religious/faith backgrounds and none. Coles (1990) acknowledges the influence of the

psychodynamic perspective. Listening attentively to the concerns and accounts of the children's experiences, Coles did not seek to place the children's comments and observations within any pre-determined theoretical framework or to draw from them any general conclusions about the nature of children's spirituality. However as a result of his conversations with so many children from a range of backgrounds, Coles concluded that spiritual awareness is a universal human attribute (Hay, 2006).

In my study – like Coles I adopt the position that there is a spiritual element to all humanity and am persuaded that it is within and evidenced as a developing aspect of identity and creative activity from birth. Through listening to young children I am seeking answers to how they express this phenomenon of spirituality – to document how it is revealed, expressed by two and three year olds in languages that will not be solely verbally articulated.

2.5.2 Sparks of spirituality

In their research in maintained primary schools - with no religious affiliation - Hay and Nye (1998) worked with children, aged 6-7 years and 10-11 years, and through extensive conversations with the children, sought to 'identify the areas of children's language and behaviour where the 'sparks of spirituality' may be found' (Nye, 1996, p.9). Premised on a belief in the innate spirituality of children, five identified categories of spiritual sensitivity 'Awareness sensing, Mystery sensing, Value sensing, Relationship and Meaning (c/f Hay and Nye 1998, p.57)', were used, as a starting point, through which to relate children's spiritual experiences to those traditionally expressed within a religious discourse. Emerging from their conversations with the children they identified a core expression of spirituality they called 'relational consciousness'. This they argue was a distinctive awareness of relatedness 'to things, other people, him/herself, and God' (Hay and Nye, 1998

p.109). The categories of spiritual sensitivity they identified have been influential for other empirical research since 1996 (e.g. Hyde, 2005) and the core category of 'relational consciousness' is more widely recognised in the literature as being where spiritual feelings alongside other 'motives and feelings that arise *inside* (emphasis in original) children and adults' (Trevarthen, 2011, p176) underpins the generation of self-confidence and the urge for '*...the collaborative creation of meaning* (emphasis in original) or cultural learning' (ibid, p.176).

The decision to situate their research into children's spirituality (Hay and Nye, 1998) in a secular context was one I also decided to pursue in order to avoid a bias likely to be present in a nursery with a religious affiliation. Hay and Nye's (1998) definition of spirituality as innate, insofar as it is common to all humanity, is one shared in my research. Nye (2006), recounts that many hours were spent in the schools building relationships with the children before data collection, however I found the methodology in this research problematic as it poses ethical dilemmas in terms of its lack of transparency about a focus on spirituality with the schools and on the children's consent and continuing assent to participate. Ethical guidance for education research has changed over time and the methodology of their study would not meet the current British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) ethical guidelines, nor the earlier version (BERA, 2004), in force in 2009 when I applied to the University Ethics Committee for approval.

Whereas the focus in Hay and Nye's study was to relate the documented accounts of children's spiritual experiences to those more commonly expressed in religion, in my study I am seeking to interpret the children's languages (Rinaldi, 2005) through a lens of behaviours not associated with religion.

In contrast to Hay and Nye's (1998) study, the Children and Worldviews Project (Erricker, Erricker, Sullivan, Ota & Fletcher, 1997), the last of the three seminal studies reviewed in this section, does not connect spirituality with religious concepts.

2.5.3 The Children and Worldviews Project

In the Children and Worldviews Project (Erricker et al., 1997) researchers interviewed children aged 7-11 years from four primary schools. With an aim to investigate the ways children learn, this research was premised on '...a belief that the way in which children learn cannot be separated from who they are and the experiences that have shaped that identity' (Erricker and Erricker, 1996, p.184). Influenced by Piagetian theory of assimilation and accommodation, the children's experiences and their interpretations of those experiences underpin all subsequent experiences. In this project Erricker et al., (1997) argue that the selective patterning of experiences and reflections form the child's world view. Adopting a narrative approach the researchers sought, through interview, to engage with matters of importance to the children. From these conversations with the children about significant people and important experiences (including those of significant loss and conflict) in their lives they proposed that children's use of metaphorical language opened the door to understanding their spirituality. In today's secular postmodern society with its implicit discourse of childhoods that are consistently 'happy', it may mean that 'listening' to young children's search for meaning through painful experiences is problematic. For example amongst the practitioners I surveyed in my pre-doctoral study (Goodliff, 2006) was some shared understanding that 'happiness' should be a right for young children and that it should be prioritized in early years environments in order to protect them from the pain of the world.

Although each of the above research studies was carried out through interview and conversations with older children than in my study, they each focus on a search for children's awareness and expressions of spirituality. They avoid limiting spirituality to a specific religious outlook and though their methodologies largely assume that spiritual experience is mediated solely by spoken language, they offer children a chance to 'voice' the spiritual. The studies reviewed below extend the listening approach of Coles (1990) to enquire with younger children about their experiences of the spiritual.

2.5.4 Empirical studies of younger children's spirituality

2.5.4.1 Talking to young children about things spiritual

One of the earliest researchers to study the spiritual awareness of young children in ordinary activities, McCreery (1996) talked to 4 and 5 year old children in reception classes in England in order to gain an understanding of younger children's conception of the spiritual. She defined spirituality as '[a]n awareness that there is something Other, something greater than the course of everyday events' (McCreery, 1996 p.197). Aware that young children quickly learn to give adults the answers they think are wanted, McCreery determined to avoid asking children leading questions, or offer terminology, that might generate standard 'religious' (McCreery, 1996, p.199) responses. Instead of interviewing and asking questions she proposed a dialogic approach presenting situations through pictures, stories and conversations to explore the children's spiritual understanding. Three significant environments in the children's cultural experiences - home, school and television - were identified as places likely to '...raise questions about the spiritual in a child's mind' (McCreery, 1996, p.198), each linked to specific events. Home, McCreery (1996) suggests, is where children first explore their identity with experiences or situations such as birth, death, love, trust,

joy, sadness; In school, painting, drawing, play, stories and singing were identified as classroom events where children may encounter danger, failure, reward, companionship and success leading to possible spiritual reflection. Events accessed through television or video offer children access to worlds beyond their own, where they encounter cultural differences and can gain knowledge about violence, death, suffering, social taboos, goodness and bad behaviour. The three influential places in children's lives that McCreery (1996) identifies reflect the layered environments of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory, although the bi-directional influence of the child on, for example, their home and school environments is not articulated in her study.

The first activity, based in the school hall, using posters of the natural world as a prompt was not very productive. McCreery concluded the hall did not offer an appropriate space and that the children found the activity too abstract noting the children seemed keener to tell about events in their own lives. She also realised without also recording conversations, it was impossible to fully record what the children said. Using stories, one made up and one published, to understand children's notions of life and death the researcher felt was more successful, but this approach leading the conversations to fit in with what she wanted to explore, raised ethical questions for me. Her third activity, using a photo of her young nephew as the way in to think about difficult questions 'Adam asks me' (ibid, p.203), elicited much richer engagement and conversation with the researcher.

Insights from this study with 4 and 5 year olds are useful in identifying potential practical challenges such as difficulties distinguishing individual children's voices from audio recordings; and the value of interacting with children in familiar places and through modes 'which relate to their own lives...' (McCreery, 1996, p.204).

McCreery does recognise the potential of other ways children might communicate an awareness of the spiritual but acknowledges interpreting conversation is much easier than ‘... their drawings or movement’ (McCreery, 1996, p.199). For my study exploring how two and three year olds in a daycare environment express spirituality, and recognising that conversation is likely to be secondary to physical activity, vocalisation and gesture, means that a different methodology must be adopted (see Chapter 3). McCreery’s study although with younger children, was also undertaken in a school environment. The following studies are located in care and education settings for pre-school children.

2.5.4.2 Listening to the spiritual

The philosophy and pedagogy of Reggio Emilia reminds practitioners of the rich potential of each child who is ‘...born with ‘100 languages’ (Rinaldi, 2005, p.17), spoken and unspoken, as tools available to mediate cultural learning through participation in social interactions and their environments (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Awareness of many languages points to the possibility proposed by Champagne (2001) for children’s spirituality to be communicated ‘without words’ (p.82). Like McCreery (1996) Champagne (2001), a hospital chaplain in Canada, wanted to find out about the spiritual awareness of younger children. Reflecting on her observations of Arielle (3 years, 6 months) talking with her father in a supermarket and Nicolas’ (4 years) conversation with his mother as he travels up in the hospital elevator, she argues that within their daily experiences young children hold open ‘...a door to spirituality’ (ibid, p.80). These ordinary experiences, Champagne (2001) asserts, offer opportunities to listen to ‘explicit expressions of their spirituality...’ situated within the children’s ‘...relationships (especially with their families), rituals, time, space and mystery’ (ibid, p.86). The challenge she

reflects, is situated in ‘...adult[s] ability to share, even to participate in those basic life experiences, which are the very substance of spirituality. The challenge of listening to and listening for children’s spirituality is double. It holds the challenge of listening to children, and the challenge of recognising spirituality’ (Champagne, 2001, pp. 80, 81).

In a later study Champagne (2003) observed sixty pre-school (aged 3-6 years old) children from three day care centres, recording 100 hours of ‘daily life situations’ (p.44). Focusing on the children’s different expressions of being, ‘attention was given to words, facial expressions, attitudes and gestures, as well as the *inner dynamics* they expressed in a way objectively observable’ (ibid, p.45). Champagne (2003) asserts that every ‘situation occurring in daily life can be an occasion both for a sensitive, relational and existential perception and response of the child’ p.45.

From her phenomenological study Champagne (2003) identified three spiritual modes of being: sensitive, relational and existential. The three modes, she asserts, are neither exclusive of one another, nor hierarchical, but each demonstrate essential facets of the being of the child. Often linked to phenomenological methodology, Champagne used a hermeneutic approach and a theological framework, linked to Christian faith and values, to interpret and bring meaning to her data. For each of the modes of being she therefore discusses both the spiritual dimension and the ‘...possible theological meaning...’ (ibid, p.45). Although I, too, hold a Christian worldview and acknowledge that spirituality can, and often will be, a facet of religious belief, in my study, because of the acknowledged tensions (discussed previously) I have chosen to disconnect (Erricker, 2001) or untether (Alexander and McLaughlin, 2003) it from religion asserting that spirituality is an attribute of all humanity (King, 2009).

Champagne’s (2003) research acknowledges the inappropriateness of interviewing young children to answer questions such as ‘how do preschoolers express their

spiritual being?’ (p.43). Her proposal (Champagne, 2001) that the researcher should listen to and listen for, expressions of children’s spirituality within the ordinary is something I found particularly helpful as like her, in my research I will be focusing on two and three year olds’ everyday lives and exploring how these younger children create and express dimensions of the spiritual. The use of a hermeneutic approach (Champagne, 2003) to interpreting the data from her later study also became relevant – as discussed in Chapter 3 - as I re-considered the most appropriate methodological approach to analysis of the data in my qualitative study.

2.5.4.3 Everyday spirituality

One further study, undertaken in New Zealand, explored how pre-school children’s (3-6 years) spiritual experiences were supported in three early childhood settings, a private Christian preschool, a Montessori *casa* and a Rudolf Steiner kindergarten (Bone, 2008). Bone introduces the concept of ‘*everyday spirituality*’ (ibid, p.265) that ‘...recognises the extraordinary in the ordinary’ (Bone et al., 2007 p. 344). The New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), is bi-cultural, influenced by the indigenous worldview of Maori culture and recognises the importance of spirituality in children’s holistic development. In contrast to the UK, the indigenous influence in New Zealand that recognises a spirituality distinct from religion suggests in that country they are ‘...used to discussing the spiritual (as opposed to religion)’ (Bone, 2007 personal communication) but in discussing the nature of her research (where the spiritual was not linked to faith or religion) with adults from each setting, suspicion and anxiety was expressed. ‘Many teachers and parents said that what they feared ... was the hidden agenda or proselytising and an unacknowledged religious bias’ (Bone et al., 2007, p.345).

Within Bone's (2008) concept of '*everyday spirituality*' (p.265) is an understanding of spirituality as a means of connection. Everyday spirituality can be understood in more depth through the interpretation of episodes in relation to 'spiritual witness, spiritual in-betweenness, and the spiritual elsewhere'. 'Everyday spirituality is not proposed as a way of reducing the mystery and wonder integral to the spiritual experience, but introduces the idea that taken-for-granted routines and patterns in daily life can be perceived as spiritual' (Bone, 2005, p. 309). She proposes that situated within the everyday narratives of young children's lives – such as preparing or sharing food - are spaces with potential for interpreting activity and reflection as mediating spirituality.

Although Bone writes from the context of New Zealand, where an understanding of the spiritual is not immediately associated with religion as in England, she comments that in practice practitioners struggle to meaningfully locate it in children's experiences '...very often the inclusion of spirituality in early childhood education is seen as a question of recognising festivals, accommodating different religious beliefs...' (Bone et al., 2007, p.352).

As in my thesis Bone situates her study within a socio-cultural discourse, which reflects the construct of a '... competent child who is capable and well aware of the world around him or her...' (Bone, 2007, p.61).

2.6 Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has explored the broad landscape of spirituality and provides a backdrop for my research into young children's spirituality. The studies reviewed influenced how I developed my research and realised the potential of case studies and participative methods, such as observation, for my study with children in early childhood settings (Champagne, 2003; Bone, 2007). Focusing on

very young children and adopting a socio-cultural approach, required a methodology that acknowledged and affirmed their capability as co-participants and partners in the research process (Aubrey et al., 2000), recognising that the children themselves create and co-construct how they express their spirituality.

The review of empirical research exploring the spirituality of children confirms the previously asserted observation (see Chapter 1) that this is an under-researched area; there are few studies that have attended to the languages of spirituality (Chater, 2005) by young children, and particularly of those under three years old. To reiterate, there is a gap in knowledge related to spirituality and its expression by children aged two and three years in the UK that this study addresses through the following key research question: *How do two and three year old children express spirituality?*

By adopting a socio-cultural approach based on knowledge being situated through interaction, (i.e. that recognises that the children themselves create and co-construct meaning with adults and peers in the context of their day nursery), this study further extends the potential to practitioners to understand how the spirituality of young children can be recognised and supported.

Having examined definitions and understandings of spirituality from the literature discussed above, I now move to synthesise them into my understanding, and the development of a framework that is unique to this study. This research locates spirituality in the potential of every child to relate to questions of both transcendence and ultimacy. On the previously asserted premise that spirituality is not synonymous with religion I argue that it is intimately connected to relationship, meaning making, creativity (indeed, perhaps often misunderstood, if only implicitly in policy, as being 'merely' creativity) and enables the child to make sense of those questions of ultimate

significance, such as who am I, what am I, who are you, or what is the world like?

These definitions frame my empirical study.

In the next chapter I explore the methodology for my research and introduce the research design.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed the literature in the previous chapter, this chapter outlines and justifies the research design and methodological approach developed in order to investigate how young children, aged two and three years, who attend a day nursery, express their spirituality. As explained in Chapter 1 and revisited later in this chapter, whilst the main research question in this doctoral study is *'How do two and three year old children express their spirituality?'* an additional question, reflecting the hope that the findings from this research would be helpful to practitioners, was also articulated: *'How might a socio-cultural perspective illuminate how the spirituality of two and three year old children can be recognized and supported by practitioners?'*

My search of the literature revealed no previous study in the UK specifically exploring expressions of spirituality in very young children outside of school settings. Previous research studies (discussed earlier) exploring children's spiritual development or spirituality have, in England, focused on children, aged 4-12, in schools (see for example, Erriker et al., 1997; Hay and Nye, 1998; McCreery, 1996), with methodologies that largely assume that spiritual expression is mediated solely by spoken language. For example, the children are interviewed, or engaged in conversations, which are recorded and transcribed by the researchers. The age of the children participating in my research precluded such an exclusive focus upon vocalization and therefore needed to acknowledge a much broader range of expression, such as gesture and imaginative play.

In this chapter I argue that exploring a particularly abstract concept, such as spirituality, with very young children required the development of a unique and

appropriate methodology: one that acknowledged and affirmed the children's capability as co-participants and partners in the research process (Aubrey et al., 2000, Clark, 2003). It also necessitated opportunities for different 'languages' of spiritual expression to be heard, and recognized that the children themselves would create and co-construct how their spirituality was expressed. The development of an innovative methodology strengthens the potential contribution to knowledge and practical application.

In Section 3.2 I explain the development of the theoretical framework underpinning the research and in Section 3.3 discuss the ways research rigour was addressed. Section 3.4 details the ethical procedures followed including discussion of the research context and ethical consideration in building relationships of trust for research exploring a sensitive topic. In Section 3.5 I discuss the choice of data collection tools and in 3.6 revisit aspects of reflexivity. The final sections provide detail on the data collection process (3.7) and explanation of the data analysis (3.8) procedures. A summary is provided in Section 3.9.

3.2 Theoretical framing

In this section I discuss my rationale for a qualitative research methodology. I explain the epistemological and ontological position I adopt and how this clarifies the qualitative research paradigm within which this research study is situated. One of the intended outcomes articulated in my original proposal was the hope 'to identify an accessible framework for practitioners (and OfSTED) to evaluate how spirituality is experienced and expressed within the early years curriculum'. This implicit political stance suggested a direct relationship between my research and its potential to ultimately influence policy/practice in early years settings and is based on exploring

children's spirituality as a situated concept (developed over time in social contexts). Although the additional question to my research, above, implies a continued concern with pedagogical outcomes, at the end of the first year I changed my intention to adopt a methodological approach that facilitated the collection of data to answer my main question, i.e. solely *how is spirituality expressed by two and three year olds*.

This is because further review of the literature and continued reflection on the findings from my pre-doctoral study exploring practitioners' understandings of the notion of children's spirituality (Goodliff, 2006), suggested to me that the more urgent focus in my doctoral research was to listen to the child in order to uncover meanings about spirituality and how it is expressed.

3.2.1 Epistemology and ontology

Research design is influenced by epistemological (what can be known) and ontological (how reality is viewed) assumptions (Hatch, 2002). According to Crotty (1998, p.10), epistemology, the theory of knowledge, sits alongside ontology, the study of being, and informs the theoretical foundation of research.

In this study adopting a socio-cultural view of the child and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990, 2003) to explore the children's expressions of spirituality, where the children themselves are recognised as creators and co-constructors of knowledge, a constructionist epistemology underlies my research where meaning '...is not discovered but constructed' (Crotty, 1998, p.42). This epistemological assumption implicitly views knowledge, or ways of knowing, as rooted in experience and unique personal insight and 'imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects and a rejection of the ways of the natural scientist' (Cohen et al., 2007, p.7). From a socio-cultural theoretical perspective, I understand that epistemology and ontology are inter-

related and, in this research, concerned with negotiating meanings of spirituality and how it is represented in the environment of the nursery.

Interpretive paradigm

Research paradigms underpin methodological approaches to research. Cohen et al. (2011) cite Kuhn's seminal work for understanding the concept of a paradigm as

'a way of looking at or researching phenomena, a world view, a view of what counts as accepted or correct scientific knowledge or way of working, an "accepted model or pattern" (Kuhn, 1962, p.23), a shared belief system or set of principles, the identity of a research community, a way of pursuing knowledge, consensus on what problems are to be investigated and how to investigate them...' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.5).

The research paradigm, or framework then contains the beliefs that shape how the researcher sees the world and their chosen research topic (Hughes, 2001). Or as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert, the research paradigm is '[t]he net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises...' (p.25). Based on the socio-cultural epistemological and ontological assumptions articulated above, that implicitly view ways of knowing and being as negotiated and based on experience and unique personal insight, that reality is socially constructed, and related to a person's situatedness in the world (Koch, 1995), this research study is located in the interpretive paradigm.

3.2.2 Qualitative study

Eisner (1981), in his seminal discussion of key differences between scientific (quantitative) and artistic (qualitative) methodological approaches, argues (ibid, p.7), that artistic approaches 'attempt to shed light on what is unique in time and space while at the same time conveying insights that exceed the limits of the situation in which they emerge'. In other words, through rich, vivid accounts and interpretations of particular individuals' experiences and actions, a generalized understanding about

constructions of meaning might be accessed. To explore how two and three year old children express spirituality in the day nursery they attend, the aim in my research is to actively make sense of people's behaviours (including my own), through participation with the children in that community (Wenger, 1998), and through the generation and interpretation of data to surface meaning in relation to expression of spirituality. As Ely et al., (2006) - citing Sherman and Webb (1988) - state '... qualitative research...has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it' (Ely et al., 2006, p.5). As a researcher with a belief that being and knowledge are socially constructed and situated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), keeping in mind the intimate relationships of the children's lives and the socio-cultural shaping of their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), was therefore paramount in the design of this qualitative study.

In summary, the epistemological and ontological positions articulated earlier, based on my claims to adopting a socio-cultural perspective, together with situating my research question within the interpretive paradigm, support my choice of a qualitative approach to my research design. An ethnographic case study approach was chosen as most appropriate for investigating the research question, because the nursery is viewed as the interpretive community.

In the following section I discuss my rationale for choosing this approach. I turn first to consider the rationale for ethnography.

3.2.3 Ethnographic approach

An ethnographic approach enables the researcher to unearth the complexities or layers of what happens between people in social situations (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004).

Ethnography is fundamentally interpretive because it is concerned with understanding

the lived experiences of humans (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Citing Denzin (1994), Jeffrey and Troman (2004, p.536) state that the ethnographic approach

'...captures and records the voices of lived experience...contextualises experience... goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances...presents details, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another' (Denzin, 1994, p.53).

Through establishing relationships of trust over time I was able to listen to and document the detail of the children's lives in the nursery. Ethnography does not have one standard definition, and has been influenced over time by a range of theoretical ideas including phenomenology, hermeneutics and post-modernism (Hammersley, 1995). However Hammersley asserts that ethnographic study will usually have most of the following five features:

- People's actions/behaviour are studied in everyday contexts
- Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main sources
- The approach to data collection is unstructured
- The focus is usually small-scale – perhaps a single setting or group; and
- The analysis of data involves interpretation of meaning. (Hammersley, 1995, p.3)

These features are all reflected in the design of my study exploring how young children express the phenomena of spirituality in the everyday context of the day nursery they attend. Multi-modal, participatory data collection tools were selected and a hermeneutic approach, rather than grounded theory, chosen for analysis and interpretation of the data. This is explained and discussed later in the chapter.

Insider/outsider

A participant methodology involves the researcher and the researched in the investigation. However, in ethnography the researcher will always be an outsider who, although describing and analyzing meanings in detail, never fully comprehends the culture of the insiders or the researched (Penn, 2005). Employing an ethnographic approach in my study with young children in daycare the children were participants and co-constructors with practitioners and the researcher in the research process.

The potential benefits of ethnographic research to the researcher and researched have been highlighted by Aubrey et al., (2000) thus:

‘Ethnography aims to help the researchers (*the outsiders*) ...to understand the group’s values, culture and social activities better but also and more importantly, ethnography also aims to help the group (*the insiders*) understand themselves and their way of life better. In this way ethnography can be empowering for the participant members of the observed community’ (ibid, p.112).

In most respects I was an outsider in my research, insofar as I did not know, and was not known by, the participants in this study the nursery, i.e. the practitioners or any of the children/families. However the owner of the nursery, an academic colleague working in another higher education institution, was known and, as I later reflect (see Section 3.7), I did not fully anticipate the impact of my professional role that blurred the insider/outsider relationship.

In the next section I explore the rationale for selecting a case study within an ethnographic approach.

3.2.4 Case Study

The aim of a case study is interpretation; thus they are often situated or operate within the interpretive paradigm (Bassey, 1999). The case study approach is particularly appropriate for investigating phenomena in real life to answer 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin, 1994) enabling the researcher to focus on real-life situations.

According to Stake (2003, p.137) who identifies different types of case study, the 'instrumental' case study is where '... a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue ...' (ibid, p.137). This is the case study used here.

For this thesis a case study undertaken in a day nursery was chosen to provide ethnographic description of the phenomena of spirituality expressed by the two and three year olds present in the nursery. As researcher I was participating in young children's real-life situations as a means to document and interpret how they express spirituality.

Case study research usually involves multiple types of data and can be both inductive – used to generate theory – and deductive as new insights are revealed. The imperative is to describe in detail participants' experiences - 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) – documenting in different ways what is seen and heard by the researcher and, for me, capturing the richness in the 'voices' of the children. In adopting an ethnographic approach to investigating my research question, the children - as the participants – become positioned with the researcher and parents and practitioners as equal partners in the process (Aubrey et al., 2000).

In selecting a case study approach to explore how young children express spirituality I was mindful to address the issues of generalization and reliability. I had originally intended to identify one or two registered early years day-care settings offering home-based care (i.e. childminders) or community based care (i.e. day nurseries or

children's centres) for children aged two and three years old as sites in which to collect data. Arguably, involving more than one site to investigate my research question might make the outcomes more generalisable than only collecting data from one setting (Burgess et al., 2006) as it may be possible to make comparisons (Gomm et al., 2002).

However since my review of the literature revealed no other research studies in England exploring spirituality or spiritual well-being with toddlers in day care settings, and practitioners have no guidance on how addressing the spiritual dimension of children's lives might be evidenced, a single case study might be defended because of the relevance of findings to early years professional practice. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) argue that more ethnographic research within early childhood settings is needed 'allow[ing] new voices to be heard – these are the voices of teachers, other carers, families and the children themselves.' (ibid, p.194)

Reflecting on how to move forward with an ethnographic study, it was helpful to consider the three temporal modes of ethnographic practice identified by Jeffrey and Troman (2004). The three modes – see below - are presented on a continuum but the authors note that each mode might represent one type of ethnographic practice or all three modes may be incorporated in one research study:

- compressed time mode
- selective intermittent time mode
- recurrent mode

(Jeffrey and Troman, 2004, p. 538)

The length of time available for any study and the frequency with which the researcher is able to access the site(s) determines the design of any ethnographic

study. A period of six to nine months was identified to undertake the data collection for my research. Based on experience from my pilot study this would include allowing sufficient time, before commencing formal data collection, to participate in the setting in order to be 'inside' the children's interests and to become familiar to children and adults. The 'selective intermittent time mode' (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004, p.538) seemed most relevant to my position and circumstances. This mode is described as characterized by a longer research period of between three months to two years, but with a flexible approach to the frequency of visits to sites to collect data. The frequency of visits was determined by my working timetable so it was imperative to establish a flexible approach.

3.3 Qualitative research – rigour and trustworthiness

In this section different approaches to evaluating qualitative research are discussed. As argued earlier (3.2) developing a close fit between the epistemological underpinning, the ontological stance and the theoretical perspective of research and methodology strengthens the intellectual rigour of the project (Crotty, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that for qualitative research rather than the commonly accepted criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity it is necessary to establish the trustworthiness of studies in the naturalistic paradigm. Trustworthiness, they assert is the extent to which the researcher can '...persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an enquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of' (ibid, p.290). Ely et al., (1991) link trustworthiness with the quality and rigour of the research processes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In the following section I discuss how these criteria were met in this research.

3.3.1 Credibility

Four ways suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure credibility of research findings were used: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and peer checking. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were addressed through commitment to spending sufficient time at the nursery to generate extensive and rich data such that – from my ongoing analysis and reflection - by the end of the data collection phase, I decided no further observations were necessary. Triangulation –although I was the sole researcher in this study, to facilitate verification of the findings multiple methods of data collection (see 3.7) were used. The addition of a day's filming in the nursery by a professional film crew (see Table. 3.1) added to the interpretive potential of this data as I had no influence on episodes filmed. Peer checking – was largely through presentation and research conversation with my early years colleagues at the university and presentation of findings at research conferences (Goodliff, 2011; Goodliff, 2012). These occasions gave opportunity for peers to critique methodological decisions (see Chapter 6) and to advise and comment on analysis of findings and possible practical application. My intention to use member checks – through conversations during data collection, and interview feedback on drafted vignettes (two selected texts in Chapter 4), some months beyond the end of data collection phase (see Table 3.1), was of limited value for ensuring credibility. The practitioners were interested in my observations but this did not translate into any responses to my brief questionnaire/invitation to share observations of their own (see 3.4.3). Comments from the nursery manager on the drafted vignettes were very positive 'interesting', 'fascinating' but I was not questioned about my interpretation.

3.3.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent findings from the research might be more widely applied. This is challenging for qualitative research such as my study, as findings are particular to Gateway Heath nursery. I have addressed this by providing '...the widest possible range of information...' (Ely et al., 1991p.317) on the research context and detailed description of the phenomenon (in this study, spirituality) being investigated.

3.3.3 Dependability and confirmability

Dependability has been addressed by clearly demonstrating the thinking and rationale for decisions made throughout the research processes. In this chapter of the thesis all methodological decisions are documented and the specific analytic approach and process is explained. The aim of confirmability in this research was to provide a transparent account for scrutiny that traces the stages of analysis and interpretation of the data. Within this thesis an audit trail of the steps taken at different points is illustrated by use of tables/diagrams.

This section has considered how trustworthiness and rigour was attended to in this qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The following section discusses the data collection phase and ethical procedures followed.

3.4 Ethical procedures

During the pre-project phase I met initially with the director and deputy director of the group of nurseries, plus the manager of the research site nursery, to discuss the aims of the study in more detail (see Fig.1). Recognising the sensitive nature of the research (Renzetti & Lee, 1993; Bone, 2007) and possible apprehension of the nursery staff, this early meeting also provided opportunity to discuss the notion of children's spirituality and specifically how it was defined in the project. To support the inclusive

definition of spirituality being adopted – distinct from religious affiliation - copies of an extract from a chapter entitled *Young Children's Spirituality* (Dowling, 2005) highlighting holistic meanings of spirituality were offered as a potential way in to discussions with the practitioners in the nursery. During the subsequent visit to the setting in this first phase, conversations with practitioners sought to allow relationships of trust and respect to be established where fears and uncertainty about the phenomenon of spirituality could be shared.

Sensitive area of research

The development or fostering of children's spirituality is not necessarily a contentious goal, but spirituality is a potentially sensitive and controversial term (Adams et. al, 2008) and topic for research (Renzetti and Lee, 1993; Bone, 2007). This was confirmed to me during interviews with practitioners in my pre-doctoral research (Goodliff, 2006) exploring their understandings of spirituality/spiritual development (see Chapter 1). Many of the practitioners I interviewed expressed surprise at being asked about the topic and several admitted to me that they had initially been suspicious and anxious, thinking questions would be about religion. Bone et al. (2007), who researched the spiritual experiences of young children in early childhood settings in New Zealand, similarly encountered fears from teachers and parents. 'Many teachers and parents said that what they feared ... was the hidden agenda or proselytising and an unacknowledged religious bias' (ibid, p.345). Having obtained enthusiastic, positive response from the proprietor of five day nurseries to undertake my research in one of the nurseries, I knew this was only the initial stage in negotiating the necessary ethical approval and building relationships of trust with all participants.

3.4.1 Ethical considerations

Researching with children requires particular ethical consideration and an understanding that they form a 'vulnerable group' in categories of human research participants (Oates, 2006). The empirical work in this doctoral study was undertaken in 2009. The ethical guidelines followed were therefore the 2004 Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (BERA, 2004¹). Informed consent was gained from the children, their parents and from Gateway Heath² nursery staff, with the right to withdraw, for any or no reason, at any time. Assurance was given of the anonymity of the data and its secure storage. The names of all participants, and of the setting, were changed to protect identity. The inevitable power imbalance between children and an adult researcher together with children's ability or capacity for understanding the research process, characterise the difference between research with children and adults (Hill, 2005) and explain the former's vulnerability (Oates, 2006). Children should not be '... pressurised into taking part... (Hill, 2005 p.63) and only involved if they want to be. The rights of children to be consulted and to have their views heard are also set out in articles 12 and 13 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). My commitment, set out earlier in this chapter, to a construct of the child as an active participant (Clark, 2005) in the research process, capable of co-constructing meaning and with agency to participate and to be involved in decision-making (James and Prout, 1990, Dahlberg, et al., 1999, 2007) meant that asking the children for their consent and gaining their assent to be involved was a priority. Discussion of how all participants were consulted follows.

¹ Relevant at time; since updated BERA (2011)

² Name changed to protect identity of setting and participants

3.4.1.1 Building ethically sound relationships

From the outset I was concerned that all participants should be consulted and informed about my research. These consultations and communications were crucial in preparing my application for ethical approval from the University's Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (OUHPMEC). Ethical approval (Ref.HPMEC/2009/#570/1 – Appendix 3) was received on 27th April, 2009. I took particular care to prepare an initial information sheet for the day nursery staff (Appendix 4). At a meeting at the end of March 2009 I shared an early draft of this document with the nursery owner, a co-director, and the manager of the nursery that would become my research site. With concern for the children's vulnerability, in addition to having the consent of parents, I explained my intent to include the children's designated key workers as gatekeepers of the children's ongoing consent (Flewitt, 2005) throughout the research. Having adult gatekeepers present to alert me to any distress to a child that my presence might inadvertently cause was important. I knew that the nursery allocated children to key person groups. I therefore sought clarification from the nursery manager as to the expectations of key persons to be familiar with the background, behaviours and any particular likes and dislikes of the children in their group. It was confirmed that children's key persons are expected to know each child in their group well and are responsible for documenting learning and development and communicating with parents. Each child is placed in one of three Key Person Groups with two of the six members of staff assigned to each group. The final section of the Information sheet for staff therefore included specific acknowledgement of the role of the key workers (see highlighted text on Appendix 4).

This Information Sheet was subsequently circulated to all six members of staff working in the nursery and discussed before I commenced data collection. In the document I acknowledged the sensitivity of the topic, but also contextualised my

interest in this aspect of young children's development by reference to extracts from the EYFS framework (DCSF, 2008) where spirituality is referred to explicitly. The staff would be familiar with the first underpinning principle of this framework 'a Unique Child' (DCSF, 2008) where this dimension of young children's lives receives explicit reference but not fuller exemplification. I also explained how my intention was to explore the phenomena by entering into the children's everyday world as they experienced life in the day nursery. In the information sheet I did not define 'spirituality'. I discuss the consequence of this omission as it was perceived by staff, in a later section. Cohen et al., (2007, p.54) argue that seeking informed consent from young children involves two stages. The first, seeking permission from adults responsible for the prospective participants and the second, approaching the children. In this context I therefore sought permission from parents and then from the children. Informed consent involves the researcher in providing not only '...a credible and meaningful explanation of their research intentions...' but '...that children must be given a real and legitimate opportunity to say that they do not want to take part (Fine and Sandstrom (1988) cited in Cohen et al., 2007 p.54).

A letter to parents (Appendix 5) was prepared giving information about my research and requesting permission for their child to participate. The important ethical issues relating to confidentiality, anonymity of the data, and the rights of both the children and parents to withdraw their permission at any time was explained. The different methods of data collection were outlined including the use of photographs and digital images. Parents were informed that any images I wished to use in my thesis would be shown to them beforehand to ensure they could give informed consent. All parents of children attending sessions at the nursery received a letter (61 in total) together with two consent forms – one (Appendix 6) for consent to participate in the research and the second (Appendix 7) a photographic/digital image consent form. Parents were

invited to contact me, or my research supervisor with any queries, or to speak to the nursery manager or deputy manager. The date for my first visit to collect data was scheduled for two weeks after the letters to parents had all been distributed. Only sixteen signed consent forms, out of 61, had been received when I made my first visit, but the nursery staff assured me they had received no queries or comments from parents to indicate that they did not wish their child to participate. The dilemma of not having written consent from all parents was addressed by always having a poster up at the door to indicate my presence as a researcher that day and encouraging any parents with concerns to raise these with staff. The lack of a full set of consent forms may have suggested parents did not object but might also have indicated they were indifferent to the subject of the research and/or the ethical issues raised. Alternatively, if they did not wish to give consent they might not have wished to be seen in a negative light by the nursery manager. Comments from the manager and deputy manager suggested this was unlikely, but it was important that my records were clear as I would need to re-visit this issue if I wished to include any material contributed from a child for whom written parental consent was not received. Four further consent forms were received subsequently.

3.4.1.2 Consent from the children

Demonstrating respect for young children in research is an ethical challenge (Formosinho, 2005). I would be researching with the children as co-participants but would be an outsider researcher (Adler and Adler, 1987), rather than a familiar member of the nursery staff. I wanted a meaningful way for the children to understand the research, but also to obtain their consent to participate throughout the research process offering them a genuine way - with or without spoken words - to express whether or not they wished to be observed or involved in any activity. Having

discussed my concerns and ideas with the nursery proprietor and the manager I decided to use pictures of boys and girls' faces with happy and sad expressions. Pointing to or picking up one of the pictures would enable the 'children to demonstrate without words their degree of liking or dislike, for a situation or activity' (Brooker, 2001, p.167).

To make the two cards, one with boys' faces, and one with girl's faces, on either side, I located pictures (commercially published) of children's faces to represent different expressions (Appendix 8). Both genders included faces that were black and white. My aim in selecting the faces was that the expressions would be easily accessible to the children. The two girls' faces are clearly opposites – happy (smiling) and sad (tears) – but the boys' faces, although the features can be interpreted as happy or unhappy might also be seen as 'not sure' and 'warm' ('rosy' cheeks and moisture). I showed the pictures to friends' three and four year old children and they readily identified the faces as happy/sad. I introduced the cards on my initial visits to the nursery to explain my presence and before collecting data. These faces soon became very familiar to the children and they readily associated my presence as a researcher with the pictures for them to use. For instance on my second visit when I did not have them visible, I was challenged by Rachel, aged three years saying, 'where are your faces ...?'

Establishing a rapport with the children and the staff was a priority if I was to become someone the children could trust (Brooker, 2001; Bone, 2005) and with whom they would be willing to share their day-to-day nursery experiences. Understanding the day-to-day culture of the nursery was important too and would also take time. In the next section the research site is described. As stated earlier (3.4.1), to ensure confidentiality, and protect the participants' identity, the name of the nursery is changed and pseudonyms for all participants applied throughout.

3.4.2 Research context

Gateway Heath Day Nursery is located in an urban community in the midlands area of England. One of five privately owned and run children's nurseries and childcare centres, all based on Local Education Authority (LEA) primary school sites, Gateway Heath nursery is situated in a mobile classroom, with its own bounded outdoor area next to the school playground. As discussed earlier, the nursery is secular (Brown, 2001) in that it has no religious affiliation. All children aged 2-4 years living in the local community are welcomed in the nursery. Many of the children attending the nursery will attend the primary school when they are four years or already have siblings who attend. It is registered for 24 children from 2-4 years and at the time of data collection followed the original EYFS (DCSF, 2008). Parents can apply for a place at the nursery (of two or more sessions per week) following their child's second birthday. The twenty children participating in the research overall, were aged between two years and three months and three years and nine months. Five were aged two and fifteen aged three years.

The five youngest children participating in the research had therefore only been attending the nursery for a short period of time. The fifteen three year olds all attended full-time (ten sessions) or for more than three sessions a week.

3.4.3 Initial visits

Whilst waiting for ethical approval I visited the nursery twice and on each occasion spent a morning as a visitor. These 'Pre-project' visits (see Table 3.1) gave me a chance to capture a representation of the physical environment – indoors and outdoors - and the different resources available and also the opportunity for an orientation phase with the staff. Staff members had already received my Information Sheet and my research had been discussed at a staff meeting but I had omitted to attach Consent

Forms to the Information Sheets. I circulated consent forms (Appendix 9) during my first visit and asked the staff to consider the request and return their form to me if willing to participate in the research.

I had also made available to staff a copy of the chapter entitled 'Young Children's Spirituality' (Dowling, 2005) that I had shared with practitioners in my pre-doctoral research (Goodliff, 2006). This accessible text situates children's spiritual development within concepts such as '...a sense of wonder, awe and mystery; search for meaning and purpose; creativity and feelings' (Dowling, 2005 pp121-123). The staff expressed interest in my research, but conversations with individual staff members that continued during the data collection phase, revealed a wish to have been given more detail on exactly what I was looking for. I became very aware that my not being sure what I was expecting to see in exploring the children's spirituality was problematic to some members of staff. For example, one member of staff, who questioned on my first visit whether I would be looking for each child's 'aura', frequently asked me 'are you getting what you thought?' I reflected that my acknowledgement to the staff of uncertainty in the area I was exploring, and of what I might find, seemed incongruent with the fact that I was the researcher and a University lecturer.

This raises ethical issues in relation to power and interpretation (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). I was the outsider but implicitly invested with a position and identity of power to the staff. To involve the staff more in participating I prepared a brief questionnaire (Appendix 10) to capture (anonymously if they wished) observations of interactions with, or of, the children that they felt might be expressing children's spirituality, however none of the staff used this and I found that individual conversations were more acceptable.

Magic moments

When first approached to consider the possibility of one of the Gateway nurseries being the research site for my study, the Director had expressed personal interest in the topic of spirituality acknowledging it was an area of children's development that received very little amplification in policy documents.

During the second of the pre-project meetings with the Director, and perhaps prompted by my discussion of my research question about children's spirituality, she had shared with me that she intended introducing to the existing categories observed by staff what she was calling children's 'magic moments': moments 'beyond words' that would be observed and documented by the staff in all five nurseries. During my visit on Week 4, Sandra, the nursery manager, showed me the new recording sheets for 'magic moments' observations of the children. Based on the guidance for practitioners provided with the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) the recording sheets included 'look, listen and note' spaces for staff to report each category if observed. In fact, throughout the period of data collection, these spaces on the sheets were largely unfilled, reflecting perhaps the inability, or reluctance, of staff to record, or even recognise these moments.

3.5 Choice of research method and tools

The rights of participation expressed in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1979) demand that children's views be sought and respected 'as evidence of their unique experiences of the world they inhabit' (Woodhead, 2005). In England the Childcare Act 2006 (OPSI, 2006) – which established the original EYFS (DCSF, 2008) - strengthened the commitment to the UNCRC through placing a duty on Local Authorities to have

regard to *listen to the voices* (my emphasis) of young children ‘... in the development of early childhood services’ (Early Childhood Forum (ECF), 2007, p.1).

The Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), underpinned by the notion of the competency of the participants, is situated in the interpretive paradigm. It is a multi-method framework of research tools that was specifically developed to listen to young children’s views and perspectives on what is important in their lives (Clark, 2003).

There are few, if any, methodologies that focus on empowering very young children. Acknowledging the ‘hundred languages of children’ (Edwards et al., 1993; Rinaldi, 2005), the Mosaic approach uses established research tools within an ethnographic approach, such as observation and interviews, together with a range of methods accessible to young children to build up the overall picture of the child’s perspective (Clark, 2006). As I had limited experience of using some of the tools in this approach, my pilot study for this doctoral research (Appendix 11), focused on an evaluation of the tools in order to evaluate their potential for generating data that documented the children’s views, thoughts, feelings about themselves and their lives that might reveal what is spiritual. Some researchers, Clark (2003) reports, have raised ethical questions as to whether aspects of the Mosaic methodology may invade children’s privacy – do we have the right to access children’s spaces? The responsibility for using the insights and knowledge gained about children’s lives rests with researchers and practitioners (Clark, 2003 p.160) and was a further ethical consideration in this study.

3.6 Reflexivity

My own personal value base and position on spirituality has been stated earlier. I was aware that my own values and beliefs influenced the choices and decisions made in

relation to my research study. Thus researcher reflexivity - 'the ability to interrogate one's own influence on the research process' Aubrey et al., (2000) p.153 – was carefully considered at all stages to identify and minimize bias. As discussed earlier it was also important to be mindful of the potential for bias arising from the power imbalance between adults and young children who may agree to requests by the researcher who is perceived as an authority figure (Oates, 2005). As the researcher I was part of the social world I was researching (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and was aware that, as a researcher it is impossible to eliminate researcher influence (Cohen et. al, 2007). Keeping a research diary from the start of the study provided an ongoing reflexive tool (Burgess, 2006) for reflecting on and interrogating my responses and decisions. For example, quite early on I recorded how I had not anticipated the power issues that occurred with three adults on the nursery staff who were also students with the university where I work. As discussed earlier, while I perceived myself as an outsider to the setting, lacking in knowledge and understanding of the nursery culture as well as being necessarily uncertain of the findings arising from my data collection, these practitioners projected a certain omniscience of early childhood development and learning.

3.7 Data Collection

The main data collection period started on 15th May, 2009. I made a total of 8 visits to the nursery each lasting 4 or 5 hours over a period of three months (see Table 3.1); I took a participant observer role in the setting, participating in the daily routine, but moving freely between areas inside and outdoors, to focus on the children. This second phase of the project involved visiting the setting weekly (not on the same day) over eight weeks (May to July) to collect data by way of documenting the children's participation in play activities. The first two of these visits involved getting to know

the children, the practitioners and the nursery routines by participating in child-initiated play and adult led activities in different areas. No audio recordings were undertaken in this early phase. After each session I reflected on what I had observed and participated in and recorded thoughts, impressions and feelings in my journal.

Discussions with practitioners during the data collection phase tended to be spontaneous rather than planned and were not recorded. In the final post-project phase, several weeks after the final data collection I returned to the nursery and held semi-structured interviews with the nursery manager and the director of the nurseries.

Although visits were generally weekly, because of the constraints of my diary it proved impossible to visit on the same day each week, which might have been preferable.

Week	Method	Data type						Reflective Journal
		Observation notes	Interview	Digital sound files (researcher transcribed)	Field Notes (expanded later)	Still digital images (shared post session)	Digital Film sequences – professionally recorded/ transcribed	
Pre-project	Interview with nursery director, deputy director and nursery manager		✓		✓			✓
Pre-project	Informal interview with nursery manager Informal practitioner conversation (x3)		✓		✓			✓
Week 1	Naturalistic observations (non-participant); children playing	✓			✓			✓
Week 2	Naturalistic observations (non-participant); children playing	✓				✓		✓
Week 3	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing (child initiated) plus group circle time; simultaneous digital recordings	✓		✓				✓
Week 4	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing (child initiated); simultaneous digital recordings	✓		✓	✓			✓
Week 5	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing (child initiated) and group story time; simultaneous digital recordings	✓		✓	✓			✓
Week 6	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing plus group music/rhyme time plus observation of one day filmed sequence; simultaneous digital recordings	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Week 7	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing (child initiated); simultaneous digital recordings	✓		✓	✓			✓
Week 8	Naturalistic observations (participant and non-participant); children playing; digital recordings	✓						✓
Post-project	Interview with nursery manager		✓	✓				

Table 3.1 - Data collection – Time frame, methods and data type

Visiting on the same day each week would have ensured continuity of encounter with those children whose pattern of attendance is similarly regular. Conversely visiting on differing days afforded opportunities to observe a wider range of children and greater variety in experience and activity offered by staff. The frequency of visits and sustained engagement in the setting allowed relationships of trust and friendship to develop between the researcher and the two and three year old children. An outline of the daily routine/timetable is provided as Appendix 12.

Influenced, as previously discussed, by the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), research data were gathered through multiple methods. To attempt to answer the question '*how do two and three year olds express spirituality*' I designed an ethnographic case study in which, as researcher, I entered the day nursery as a participant observer. I argue that there is congruence between the multiple methods used to collect and generate data and the nature of spirituality itself. It cannot simply be reduced to one set of data, but requires a variety of 'nets' to capture the multiple meanings and expressions of this human phenomenon. My focus was how the children themselves participate in constructing meanings about the spiritual through their relationships and everyday activities and interactions. In summary, a case study using an ethnographic approach was used to investigate the phenomena (Yin, 1994) of spirituality and how it is expressed by two and three year old children in one day nursery. A selective intermittent time mode (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004) underpinned the ethnographic approach. Data were gathered by way of field notes, diary, observations of events and activities, digital photographs and audio recordings of children's conversations and spontaneous vocalisations.

Participants

Of the children attending the nursery each week, five were two year olds and nineteen, three year olds. All other children were four years old. Although data collection focused on all two and three year olds attending the nursery, I initially considered focusing on just four children³: Amos (2), Christopher, (2), Billy (2) and Rachel (3). The rationale for this being that at week 3 it was evident that whereas other two and three year olds attended the nursery only two or three sessions each week, these four children were generally present whenever I attended and thus appeared more active participants. Later, and on reflection I decided to continue to focus on all two and three year olds. As a reflexive researcher it was important to interrogate any selection process or at the very least be aware that I might have chosen children for reasons that were not fully conscious. In my choice of the three year old children, the possibility arose – because of the greater number of three year olds - that I may have selected certain children because I responded to some aspect of their personality. For instance Rachel learnt my name early on and sought my company whenever I visited and I reflected on whether some personal transference was taking place.

Before discussing the analysis of data, in the following section I explain the rationale for a change in approach to analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 From grounded theory to a phenomenological approach to analysis

The focus of my study is on the nature and expressions of spiritual phenomena by young children. In the early stages of this doctoral study as my research questions

³ Names changed c/f 3.5.1

were finalised, I explored a range of qualitative research methodologies. I was relatively familiar with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as an approach to analysing data that involves systematic categorisation and coding of activities during and after the data collection period. The aim in grounded theory is to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than to impose meaning on it. Thus it is predominantly inductive rather than deductive. At this time I also encountered phenomenological research and the work of van Manen. His definition of phenomenology as the study of lived experience (van Manen, 1997) resonated with my desire to bring meaning to young children's expressions of spirituality as seen in everyday actions and interactions in the nursery. Phenomenology, which has its roots in European philosophy, is widely acknowledged as originating from the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a philosopher working in Vienna in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Cohen, 1987). The aim of the phenomenological approach is to produce detailed description of the phenomena of everyday experiences in order to illuminate or construct meaning and understanding of the phenomenon.

Just before requesting an extension in my study (towards the end of 2009), and during the initial analysis of my data I was introduced to the work of Reifel (2007) who takes a hermeneutic approach to data collection and analysis of children's play in early childhood classrooms. Reifel argues that a hermeneutic approach to interpreting young children's play is the most appropriate in making meaning of phenomena that can have multiple meanings. The reading of this chapter and further reading on phenomenology and hermeneutics proved to be pivotal in a gradual realisation that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to data analysis was more appropriate for my study than the grounded theory approach I kept gravitating to, but also, as I discuss later, how I had in fact initially analysed observed phenomena (Example, see Appendix 13).

3.8.2 *Hermeneutics and hermeneutic phenomenology*

The focus in hermeneutics is on the interpretation of texts. Traditionally associated with the interpretation of sacred texts (e.g. the Bible), a hermeneutic approach is now applied to texts in a range of other fields. More recently it has been viewed 'as a method, or perhaps even *the* method of the social sciences' (McLeod, 2001, p.21) (emphasis in original). In contemporary hermeneutic studies any human action can be regarded as text (Ricoeur, 1984-1988; Kvale, 1996). Texts can therefore include the visual arts and music and written or verbal communication. The texts are situated in their historical and cultural context where deconstruction of text is a source of meaning (Ricoeur, 1984-1988). Further reading of the literature associated with qualitative methodologies, and in particular the differences between hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology, led to my decision to take the hermeneutic approach to data analysis in my thesis. Both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are concerned with bringing meaning or illuminating understanding of human experience (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology has its origins in the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a philosopher who worked closely with Husserl but later disagreed with him on the process of exploring lived experience. Husserl emphasised epistemological questions focusing on 'understanding beings or phenomena...' His interest was '... thinking about the world and human beings were understood primarily as knowers' (Lavery, 2003 p.7). Husserl proposed that in order to truly see, or know, the essence of a phenomenon, it was necessary to bracket out one's pre-suppositions, beliefs or assumptions about the phenomena. Thus the purpose of early reflection on, and research into, the topic is to become aware of potential biases in views so that any preconceived notions can be set aside.

Whereas Husserl argued that understanding is the way the world is known, Heidegger focused on understanding as the way we are as being human, a more ontological

focus; his emphasis is on the socio-historicity of understanding as a person's situatedness in the world (Koch, 1995). Heidegger argued that it is impossible to separate the influence of one's background and experiences from the interpretive process. Instead of bracketing off or setting aside our reflections and understandings they are embedded in the interpretive process. Taking a socio-cultural approach in my research I argue that the two and three year old children in the nursery are co-constructors with me of meanings of spirituality. Each of us will do this from pre-understanding – having been shaped by the values and beliefs connected to our own background and experiences. My position is that 'the world of human experience must be studied from the point of view of the historically and culturally situated individual'. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.514)

McLeod (2001) asserts that grounded theory 'reflects a fundamentally hermeneutic approach' (ibid, p.75) as the goal is to interpret a phenomenon. Although not something I followed when previously articulating a grounded theory approach, one of the identified steps in undertaking a grounded theory study includes not reviewing the literature in advance of collecting data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This is similar to the setting aside of preconceived notions (or bracketing out) proposed by Husserl in phenomenological research and discussed above.

The philosopher, Gadamer, was influenced by, and extended, the work of Husserl and Heidegger (Lavery, 2003). Like Heidegger, Gadamer viewed Husserl's 'bracketing out' of prejudices and assumptions prior to investigation as impossible. Gadamer asserted that the researcher's pre-suppositions or biases are part of the 'self' that he or she brings into the research and integral to the socio-cultural tensions of being. He uses the concept of horizon to describe how comprehension takes place. There is the horizon of the interpreter and that of the text. Meaning is made in the dialogue within

the two horizons. In my research the data are explored between two horizons, the cultural meaning that the children speak and act within, and second the cultural context of the interpreter (the researcher) of those texts. The goal is the fusion of horizons in which the voice of the other is heard, or when the 'I' experiences the other as the 'Thou' of the dialogue (Gadamer, 2000 p.361).

3.8.3 Hermeneutic analysis

The unit of analysis within this case study is an individual episode of observed behaviour, gesture, vocalization or interaction between children aged two and three years, and other children or adults. The expression of spirituality is a subtle and multi-layered dimension of humanity (Hay and Nye, 1998, 2006) such that rich and multi-modal data collection is actually coherent with the way in which the signs of spirituality may be revealed through word, gesture, relationship and embodied expression of emotions such as joy or sadness. Where, for older children spoken language predominates amongst the cultural tools for meaning making (Vygotsky, 1978), in these young children the researcher must be aware of other modes of communication.

3.8.4 Narrative texts

The process of text analysis therefore, first involved the creation of narrative texts – vignettes (or episodes) of the children's imaginary play and experiences in the nursery - drawn from transcribed observations, audio and video recordings, reflective journal entries, photographs and field notes containing reflections and conversations with adults and children. From this raw data over fifty narrative texts (documented episodes or vignettes) were generated and these texts provided the basis for interpretation via the hermeneutic process or circle of understanding (Laverly, 2003) discussed below.

3.8.5 The hermeneutic circle

The hermeneutic circle starts with a commitment from the researcher to understanding the context in which the texts were produced and to enter into ongoing interpretive conversation and dialogue. As Reifel (2007, p.29) states: 'Within hermeneutics, texts do not serve as facts to make a point; they serve as complicated phenomena that require contextual analysis.' Every act of hermeneutic understanding therefore commences from a pre-understanding shaped by previous values, assumptions and experiences - that situates the researcher in relation to the topic or phenomena (Gadamer, 2000). It is a task of the hermeneutic researcher to be aware of and reflexively to explain this pre-understanding in a way that feeds in to the process of understanding itself. Awareness of the pre-understanding that the reader brings to the text is important if, within the interaction between the two horizons, meaning is to be adequately gained, and amongst the pre-understanding this researcher brings to the texts (each vignette described below) is an understanding of 'the spiritual' derived from the literature of spirituality.

Pre-understanding

Based on my acknowledgement and understanding: (i) that the texts (the children's expressions) are socially and culturally situated; (ii) that my interpretation and meaning making of the phenomena is influenced by prior theoretical knowledge, personal values and beliefs; and (iii) that multiple interpretations are possible, I identified four non-hierarchical areas of behaviours categorised in the literature as related to expression of spirituality. Illustrated in Fig.3.1, these four, interrelating, areas of behaviours are based on definitions of spirituality in early years education and care policy and linked to findings articulated in previous studies of children's spirituality (McCreery, 1996; Hay and Nye, 1998; Champagne, 2003, Bone, 2007;

Hyde, 2005; Coles, 1990; Hart, 2003; Adams et al., 2008) – see Chapter 2: 2.4 and 2.5. The four areas of behaviour illustrate creativity (expressed in imaginative play, questioning, the expressive arts), relationality (expressed in connectedness to others), transcendence (awe and wonder, mystery) and reflection (includes meaning making of individual experience). These four areas provided an initial lens through which to enter into the analysis of the data (interpretive conversation) and explore meanings of the children’s spirituality. The diagram (Fig. 3.1) therefore represents the pre-understanding I brought to the data about expressions of spirituality. It is premised on the central construct, articulated previously, of spirituality as ubiquitous – in other words each element or behaviour: relational, transcendent, creative and reflective is understood at this point as a dimension of spirituality.

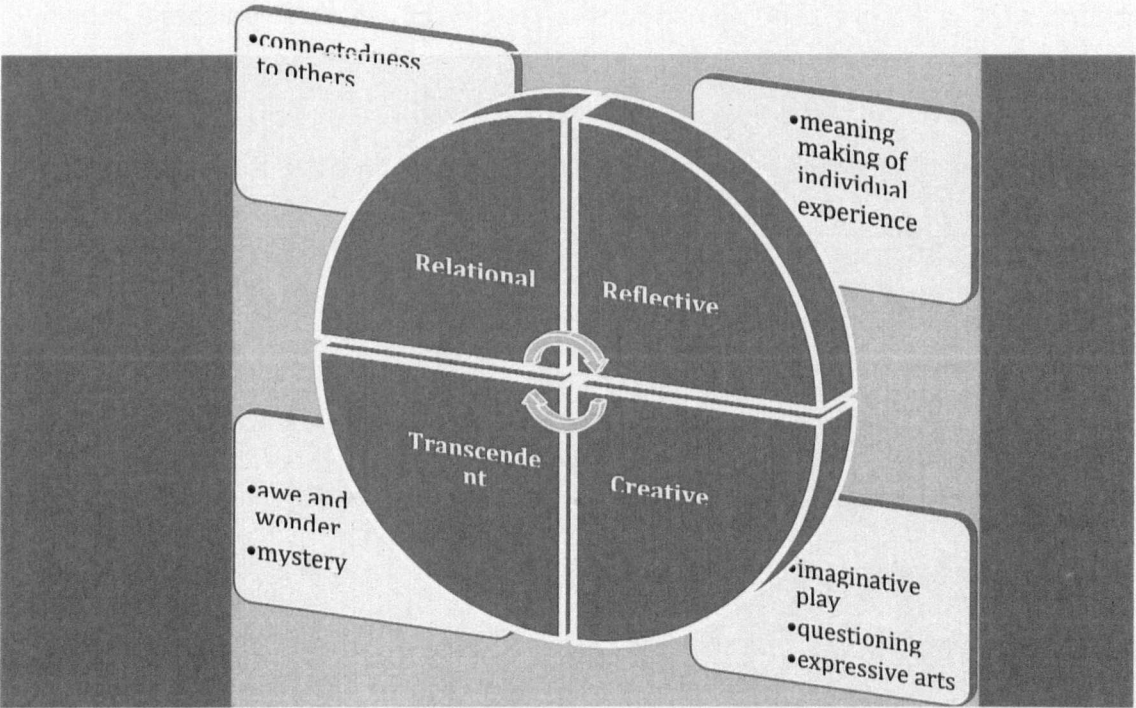


Fig. 3.1 Four elements, including behaviours. related to meanings of spirituality

3.8.6 Selection of texts for analysis

As referred to above (3.8.4), having transcribed the data from fifteen hours of audio/video recordings, in addition to observations and reflective journal entries, gathered over my eight visits to the nursery (see Table 2 above) I had more than fifty narrative texts (includes digital images) capturing fleeting moments and extended periods of the two and three year old children's actions and interactions. Selecting texts for analysis within a hermeneutic approach can present a challenge. Reifel (2007) describes scrutinising transcriptions (texts) '...until an interesting text presents[ed] itself.' (p.36). Although never claiming to be undertaking research, or to be presenting research findings, it might be argued (Reifel, 2007) that Paley's (for example, 1999; 2004) interpretive insights drawn from rich textual observations and descriptions of young children's relationships, narratives and fantasy play (see Chapter 2), represent a version of hermeneutic text analysis. To fully listen to what children tell us Paley (2004) observes, involves going '...beyond watching, listening and remembering...' (p. 3), and identifying a focus; in her case, to the themes and conversations of fantasy play. For me, exploring an abstract phenomenon such as spirituality, the focus was the relation of each text to the research question '*how do two and three year old children express spirituality?*'

To what extent was a text rich with potential to reveal multiple meanings of what was happening – were they 'spaces' where dimensions of spirituality might be recognised? I had no set number of episodes in mind to present and analyse but my criteria for selection, of what became thirteen (out of 50+) texts, included: was this an interesting episode connected with potential for expressing a spiritual dimension? Was it an exemplar of one, or more, of the four identified areas of behaviours related to meanings of spirituality (Fig. 3.1)? Were the children involved only two or three years old? Did the episodes represent their play or interactions in different contexts within

the physical environment of the nursery? On later reflection other unconscious criteria may have been applied including being drawn to episodes involving a particular child or children because they were present on more occasions I was in the setting.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has explained the research design and methodological approach developed to address the question: *how do two and three year old children express spirituality?* The rationale for a qualitative research methodology was outlined in Section 3.2 together with explanation of the epistemological and ontological positioning (3.2.1) underpinning the theoretical framing of this study within the interpretive paradigm (3.2.3). The rationale for choosing an ethnographic case study approach was discussed in Sections 3.2.3 and 3.3.4. In Section 3.3 I discussed approaches to evaluating qualitative research in order to strengthen trustworthiness and rigour. The research process, including managing the potentially sensitive nature of spirituality as a topic of research, and, how ethical considerations and guidelines were adhered to throughout, was outlined in Section 3.4. This was followed by discussion of the selected research method and tools (3.5) and researcher reflexivity (3.6).

The data collection phase was explained in Section 3.7 and exemplified, together with methods and data types, in Table 3.1. In Section 3.8, Data Analysis, the rationale for selecting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was first discussed (3.8.1 and 3.8.2); the remaining sub-sections (3.8.3-3.8.6) explain the process of analysis and selection of texts.

In summary then, having developed and established an appropriate methodological approach for exploring the phenomena of young children's spirituality, one that is able to adequately capture expressions of spirituality in an age group that has not previously been subject to widespread research into spirituality, I next discuss the analysis and findings from the data captured through this methodological approach.

Chapter 4 Presentation of data: Findings and Analysis

‘The most effective way to learn about children’s spiritual experience is to pay attention – listening to words and silence, respecting what is expressed and being aware that much may **not** be expressed’.

(Crompton, 2009, p.23)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter selected data are presented and analysed. As discussed in Chapter 3 these thirteen texts were generated through multi-layered methods and selected from a larger body of raw data. Throughout this chapter, analysing the data that will enable me to answer the research question: *how do two and three year old children express spirituality?* I reflect on Crompton’s (2009) imperative (cited above) to researchers of children’s spirituality, to pay attention to what is expressed – through words or silence – and to be aware that much may *not* be expressed.

The thirteen selected texts (vignettes) present episodes of the two and three year olds’ observed play and routine activities in the day nursery. The interpretive reading (analysis) that follows each vignette considers the multiple meanings of what is happening to elicit how the children’s gestures, actions, vocalisations, thinking or imagining might be mediating expressions of spirituality. Reflection (in italic text) on each text represents the initial conversation of the hermeneutic process (Gadamer, 2000), when, through dialogue between the text (the children’s expressions) as one horizon, the researcher strives, through questioning and reflection, to challenge prior understanding and produce fresh insight and meaning from the dialogical encounter.

The data and findings are organised into four main sections that take the previously discussed (and exemplified in Fig 3.1) four areas of spirituality - relational, transcendent, creative and reflective – representing my pre-understanding.

The texts are not presented in chronological order of collection but are organised systematically i.e. are presented and analysed (deductive analysis) within the particular element of spirituality – relational, transcendent, creative and reflective, – which was the point of entry into the conversation, as discussed in section 3.8.5 (although the first text and reflection happens to be drawn from the first day of data collection). For each episode I am asking what might be happening in a child's gesture or vocalisation: what meaning might a child be expressing in their everyday experiences in the context of the day nursery? The interpretive reflection on each text therefore represents deductive analysis where I drew on my background and perspective (pre-understanding) to situate the episodes, and inductive analysis (meaning making), where, through reflecting on the in-the-moment of a child's experience(s) and engaging in interpretive conversation with the children's behaviour, gesture, vocalisation or interactions, I introduce new constructs of expressions of spirituality.

4.2 Spirituality expressed as Reflection (meaning making – identity)

The search for meaning in life, including an understanding of identity (who am I?), and attributing meaning through reflection, are included in definitions of spiritual development (e.g. NCC, 1993; SCAA, 1995; OfSTED, 1994 – see Chapter 2). Within the episodes of the children's play and activity grouped predominantly within this area of behaviours, the following four texts were selected:

4.2.1 Text 1: Amos, Kirsty and Kirsten

In this brief observation - captured in my field notes on my first day of data collection in the nursery - Amos (2 years, 3 months) watches two three year old girls (Kirsty and Kirsten) playing in the role play area. To set this early episode in context, the Nursery manager, Sandra, had just (during Circle time) formally introduced me to the children and talked with them about why I would be coming to the nursery. This was also the first time I had shown the children the images of boys' and girls' faces, (discussed in Chapter 3), selected to be used as a means of obtaining their consent/assent – for example, to be observed and/or participate in a recorded activity. Amos attends the nursery on four days each week and started shortly after his 2nd birthday, two months prior to my first visit. Kirsty and Kirsten had both been attending the nursery for more than two terms.

This text includes the girls' play, Amos's actions, the observation of his actions and written reflections and comments about the episode.

Week 1: 15th May 2009 – 10.55-11.02 Indoors by the role play area (Field notes)	
<i>Observation and Field notes</i>	<i>Reflection and interpretive comment</i>
Kirsty and Kirsten are standing by the cooker in the role play area; Kirsty puts something (I cannot see) on Kirsten's plate. 'There you are!' Kirsty says – both girls – smiling - laugh aloud together;	I think how much they seem to be enjoying each other's company. Their exchange is warm; I reflect that although I don't yet know the girls, (nor they me) I am aware of a connection between them. They are friends
Amos spontaneously skips and jumps as he watches Kirsten and Kirsty in the role play area. He is smiling;	I note Amos's exuberance; The spontaneity of his action communicates 'this is me'. I reflect that what I have observed seemed to be an uninhibited delight in being.

Interpretive reading

What made Amos skip and jump? There appeared no external stimulus for his physical actions of skipping and jumping as he watched the two girls together. I reflected that what was observed seemed to be an uninhibited delight in being. 'This is me' his actions in this moment seemed to say. Was it something of the tangible warmth and fun Amos observed and felt in the actions and interactions of the two girls that prompted his unique spontaneous physical action? I situated this episode as primarily potentially linked to expressions of spirituality within meaning making of identity, as my interpretive gaze was on the actions of Amos. However, whilst aware that I am imposing my own interpretation, what I observed in this brief episode revealed *relational connectedness* between Kirsty and Kirsten. The warmth and trust in the interactions between the two girls suggests they enjoy one another's company and care for each other. Their reciprocal gestures suggest a shared history, if only of a few months, of participation in experiences together at the nursery. 'They are friends' I reflected in my field notes.

4.2.2 Text 2: Billy

The following extract from observation transcript (Appendix 14) focuses on Billy's (2 yrs 10 months) play with small, wooden bricks. Billy had been coming to the nursery for six months and attended everyday.

Context: A number of children, including Billy, have been playing for some time on the carpet. Most then leave to go outside and play; Esther (2 yrs 3 months) goes to have her snack; Billy remains on the carpet alone and starts building a tower with the bricks.

Week 5: 16 June 2009 - On the carpet (Observation, digital photos, Field notes) 10.22-10.30		
<i>Observation transcript</i>	<i>Digital photograph</i>	<i>Reflection and interpretive comment</i>
<p>Billy builds and completes a tower with bricks</p> <p><i>In the background – an adult calling for snack can be heard</i></p>	<p>Billy is aware I am watching and have my camera – smiles, says nothing; <i>Photo captures his delight with the success of building tower of bricks – (ref 0695, 0696 and) I take photo (0697) as he completes capturing the completion and his pleasure</i></p>	<p><i>Billy – self contained; enjoying his own company – earlier welcomed company and collaboration of Amos but contented to initiate own game. I reflect that it is another shared moment, although neither of us speak – I am present with him and he with me; we have both shut out the noise and bustle of the nursery</i></p> <p><i>Billy seems ‘chuffed’ with his success – a special moment.</i></p> <p><i>I reflect, might this be transcendent moment?</i></p>

Interpretive reading

Billy is aware I am watching and have my camera. The digital image seems to capture this moment – seen in his eyes and smile - as a shared moment.

There is something about the recognition of the achievement of building the tower that is heightened when shared by others, while essentially self-recognised. It was my presence with a camera that enabled him to express his own self-delight, shared with me. This moment seemed also to be a ‘wow’ moment for Billy – ‘a look what I can do/have done’, moment. As researcher, I reflected it was also a special moment of stillness for Billy and I to be sharing amidst the noise and bustle of surrounding nursery activity.

I situated this text primarily as linked to expressions of spirituality within meaning making of identity, as Billy's success with completing the tower of bricks is evidently a special moment for him of self-recognition. However it seemed also to be a *transcendent* moment where Billy experiences an inner connection perhaps to what he might achieve tomorrow or in the future, something beyond his present self. There is an element too of it being a *relational* moment in the silent exchange between Billy and me, and also his intentionality in sequencing the bricks into a vertical tower both reflects his pride in his motor skills and the *creative* imagination that those skills enacted.

4.2.3 Text 3: Esther

Context: In the following, thirteen minutes long, extract from the transcription of an extended filmed sequence, Esther (2 yrs 3 months) demonstrates an expression of self-delight linked to a particular achievement. Esther has only recently started attending the nursery for three sessions a week.

Esther (2) and Christopher (2) are playing outdoors with seven children (6 boys/1 girl, aged 4-7 yrs) attending after school club; all free to choose any activity: Ride on cars/bikes; sand tray; water tray; 'insects' tray; two small climbing frames with slides. Two adults – Sharon (S) and J are supervising. The camera follows Esther as a silent observer.

Week 6: 24 June 2009 - Extract from filmed sequence;		
<i>Timing</i>	<i>Transcript of observed film sequence</i>	<i>Reflection and interpretation</i>
14:35.17:06- 14:35.45:20	E drives over to where a storage pouch is hanging and from the car reaches	E's glance up at the camera suggests she is aware she has an audience.

	<p>in to bottom pocket of the pouch. Pulls out a 'football' rattle. She shakes it listening to the sound – looks up at the camera. E replaces the rattle and then hoots the car 'horn' repeatedly;</p>	<p><i>I wonder if this is welcomed by her ... a silent witness of her actions</i></p> <p><i>Hooting the car horn – 'I am here' it seems to signify.</i></p>
<p>14:36.40:06- 14:37.24:22</p>	<p>She steers the car away, towards the climbing frame/slide - avoiding a bike; an older boy in another car reverses and pushes E's car backwards – leans to shut the door. E goes to climb out of the car – seems to change mind; talking to self (inaudible). E drives over to paint easels and gets out.</p>	<p>One of the adults is near the easels where E parks. S (adult) is seen on the ramp from nursery to outdoor area.</p> <p><i>I reflect on Esther's agency – her evident competence and sense of purpose in steering the car and deciding what to do. Her self-vocalisation seems to help her decide what next to do.</i></p>
<p>14:37.24:22- 14:37.52:23</p>	<p>E walks over to the nearest slide and walks up the slide (not steps) holding the sides. When she reaches the top and stands in the tower she jumps up and down and calls out 'hey, hey' excitedly. No-one sees her or comments.</p>	<p><i>Esther is clearly very excited; her 'Hey, Hey!' is very audible on the soundtrack.</i></p> <p><i>She seems 'chuffed' with her action – I reflect on the risk she has taken; is this the first time she has attempted to walk up the slope of the slide?</i></p> <p><i>I reflect that she expresses what I describe as an uninhibited delight in being. Is this also a transcendent moment for her?</i></p>
<p>14:37.58:16 14:38.35:15</p>	<p>From the top of the slide she watches a boy on the see-saw. E slides down the slide and goes over to the other (double) slide. She goes to the bottom and then turns back – looks at</p>	<p><i>Again, Esther seems to be reflecting on her own achievement; look at me; I did this – on my own... in jumping up and down it seems to make things more meaningful a visible representation of recognition of being 'chuffed' with one's</i></p>

	<p>boy on see-saw and again approaches and repeats the earlier action; she climbs up the slope of the slide. Jumps up and down again 'ooh! Oooh!' She stands in the 'tower' of the slide looking out and then turns to face the top of slide. Calls out again 'oooh' (indistinct).</p>	<p><i>own ability.</i></p> <p><i>I reflect that her actions – a little dance - somehow capture the creativity of that moment for her. Her delight in being...</i></p>
<p>14:38.35:17- 14:38.51:14</p>	<p>A boy climbs into tower up the steps. E still in tower; he moves back to give her room; E sits in the tower whilst the boy stands and looks out over playing field.</p> <p>E slides down the slide and moves to the see-saw; she rocks alone.</p>	<p>One adult and two other after school children can be seen.</p>

Interpretive reading

Since no adult responds or acknowledges Esther's own vocalized self-achievement or enjoyment of the moment, this episode of 'chuffedness' does not have the same sense of a shared moment as that described previously with Billy. Only the camera witnesses her achievement as she jumps up and down at the top of the slide; observing a moment of 'here I am, I recognise that what I've just done is significant for me', yet her understanding and self-knowledge is evident. I situated this as predominantly *reflective* – linked to Esther's understanding and meaning making of who she is, her identity. However it seemed also to be a *transcendent* moment where she experiences an inner connection perhaps to what she might achieve on another day, something beyond her present self. The intentionality of her climbing, jumping and moving - as Esther's success with climbing up the slide (not by steps!) is evidently a special

moment for her of self-recognition – perhaps reflects pride in her motor skills. Although not acknowledged perhaps this might be a *relational* moment because it links to an earlier attempt at climbing the slide when in the company of her family or siblings. Her little dance at the top of the slide is also *creative* representing an embodied expression of feelings that might also mediate the spiritual. I wonder if it is likely Esther remembers that at home such achievement would have been admired and acknowledged. ‘Well done! You did it...!’ perhaps would have been said. I reflect that in this episode Esther experiences the loss of the shared moment – no-one notices her delight in what she did nor the significance for her.

4.2.4 Text 4: Christopher and Amos

Context: The following 16 minute extract from a longer twenty-three minute sequence was filmed in the late morning. Previously the two year olds present that day have been in a side room with Cathy (deputy manager) to participate in a separate adult led activity and all the three and four year old children have been gathered on the carpet for an adult led (by Sandra, nursery manager) group activity involving playing musical instruments (auditory discrimination) and then singing. I am seated just behind the circle of children with two other adults, Sharon and Jane. The extract commences as the younger children join the group on the carpet for story time.

The film crew (camera operator and sound man) has been in the nursery all morning.

Week 6: 24 June 2009 - Extract from filmed sequence;		
<i>Time</i>	<i>Narrative observation of film sequence plus field notes (expanded later)</i>	<i>Reflection and interpretation</i>
11.18-	The 2 year old children are rejoining the group for story time. G strokes Nathan's	<i>I reflect on this spontaneous gesture from 4 yr old Gurvinder - it seems to be a signal of</i>

11.20	<p>hair – Nathan puts his hand to his head; smiles/quizzical look. Amos, Christopher and O. move to find a space to sit down. Amos sits to the right of Sharon (adult) who has Esther on her lap. ‘Christopher (C) do you want to come to the front?’ she says</p> <p>J (adult) moves Amos to the right so he is in front of her. Amos is watching the camera man; Christopher, sitting to Amos’ right can also be seen intently watching the camera.</p>	<p><i>affection/shared between them moment; relationship</i></p> <p><i>Christopher doesn't move to the front but sits down near to Amos who has been with him in the small group activity</i></p> <p><i>Both boys seem fascinated by the camera – I reflect that perhaps returning to join the other children their interest is newly aroused by the camera and sound boom?</i></p>
	<p>S asks if anyone knows the title of the book; As children around put their hand up, C watches and begins to raise his arm. He and Amos continue to watch camera, their mouths are open.</p> <p>S begins to read story (<i>The Selfish Crocodile</i>) but A and C continue to watch the camera; A inserts his finger in his nose; moves it to his mouth and watches film crew.</p> <p>Nathan and Esther (sitting on L’s lap) are listening to story and looking as pages are turned. N strokes his throat with his right hand. A and C continue to focus intently on camera crew. A again puts finger in his nose and then mouth whilst watching camera; C puts his right arm up, places hand to back of his neck eyes still on camera; look is more puzzled - ? concern... C suddenly engages with the story as the crocodile ‘cries real tears’ and looks up at Sandra. O says ‘he had a bad tooth’ as he rubs his own tooth; Nathan is caught up in the story – intently looking at book and listening (mouth a little open); Amos still watching camera – mouth closed and hands in lap; E is now seen watching the camera from L’s lap;</p> <p>C no longer watching camera nor are his eyes on book but gazes ahead of him as if dreaming; eyes are wide open/mouth slightly open. He raises his left arm towards his head and then it drops back to his lap. One of the camera men moves across the room and C is seen tracking the movement with his head and body; As other children continue to focus on the story Rachel is seen looking behind at the camera – lips firmly together a quizzical look on face; C has his left hand to his face and his fingers push into his left temple; the hand</p>	<p><i>What is each thinking? Perhaps they wonder how the camera works? Why is the long stick being held above them?</i></p> <p><i>I reflect on their curiosity and wonder...</i></p> <p><i>Although present with the others Amos and Christopher seem ‘absent’ in a world of their own, caught up with the activity of the film crew</i></p> <p><i>Suddenly Christopher ‘returns’ and can be seen to engage with the story being told. I wonder was it the text about the crocodile crying and his tears? He looks at Sandra – perhaps for reassurance...</i></p> <p><i>I wonder where Christopher has ‘gone’ as he daydreams. His arm rises and drops seemingly involuntarily as he inhabits for a few moments a space in his imagination;</i></p> <p><i>The movement of the camera man brings him out of this moment as Christopher tracks his movement with his eyes</i></p>

	<p>flattens and covers the left side of his face as C watches camera. Other children cheer in response to story; C shows no engagement with this and continues to stare behind at camera. Amos is seen focusing on story at this point; crocodile's bad tooth.</p> <p>C stretches both arms up and to the sides of his body and wiggles; in a world of his own – head on one side; left hand to temple... slight yawn; he turns again to watch camera; S asks questions about animals in the book. Amos scratches right hand side of his head with hand and shifts his position; A leans towards Nathan; Billy is turning now and watching camera man; he shifts on his knees from side to side; Amos is twiddling his hair – he rests his right hand on his head; Billy twizzles round and puts his left thumb in his mouth; C is staring at camera man. Deborah gets up to go home. As she passes Amos reaches up with his hand to her front and strokes her. He then points at her parent.</p>	<p><i>I reflect how it is the youngest children who seem mesmerised by the camera crew – curiosity/wonder;</i></p> <p><i>The older children are engaged in the story ...</i></p> <p><i>Amos briefly connects with narrative of the story</i></p> <p><i>It is approaching the end of the morning session – Christopher's yawn and Billy's thumb in mouth suggest they are tired... Amos, too, becomes restless and twiddles with his hair</i></p> <p><i>I reflect on the spontaneous gesture from Amos to 3 year old Deborah as she passes him to go home - on his sensitivity to other children and expressions of warmth and connection</i></p>
11.28-33	<p>Whilst S continues to ask questions based on the story, Amos and C are watching the film crew. A fiddles with his right trainer; His mouth is open; he pushes his hands together and looks around him; he yawns widely; the phone rings and A engages with conversations re the book – looks back at S. as does C.</p> <p>The phone stops ringing and S asks 'was the crocodile kind?'</p> <p>Carly and another girl answer; Nathan puts his hand up; 'the crocodile said no drinking and no bathing....'</p> <p>Lucy calls out 'My grandma's got a cat called Poppy'; Amos says with a smile 'Mummy's got a cat'.. S 'that's lovely...'</p> <p>End of sequence</p>	<p><i>Amos now yawning – both he and Christopher return to gaze at film crew;</i></p> <p><i>I reflect on how the spontaneous contribution from Lucy (4) about her grandma's cat seems to create a connecting space for Amos with his home as he remembers his mother.</i></p> <p><i>Sarah acknowledges both children's contribution.</i></p>

Interpretive reading

In this filmed sequence the camera captures the curiosity and awe of Christopher and Amos as they encounter the activity of the camera crew and wonder at its presence and role. I reflect on how much the activity of filming catches their attention rather than the story being shared by Sandra. I situated this text primarily as *reflective* but elements of the children's behaviours, as they are transfixed on the filming equipment, suggest it is also a *transcendent* moment. The camera and sound boom are mysterious beyond their everyday experience. Both two year olds seem to have entered a 'day dream', where their level of awareness of what is going on around them has decreased and in their imagination they have entered another space. I reflected they seem to be in their own individual world where the routine noises of the nursery do not intrude. This episode also linked to potential of spirituality expressed in *relationships*. When Christopher appears to re-enter the story being shared, as the narrative covers 'crying and tears', he doesn't say anything but perhaps those words trigger a memory that briefly connects with an experience at home as he looks to the adult as if to seek reassurance. Amos' spontaneous physical connection with Deborah as she passes him to go home also caused me to reflect on his sensitivity to others and at the end of the session Lucy's mention of her grandma's cat seems to prompt Amos to remember aloud his mother's cat.

4.3 Spirituality experienced in close and significant relationships

We have seen already from the literature that a core category of spiritual expression is relational consciousness (2.5.2.) and the episodes selected for this group of texts have as their point of entry strong relational characteristics. The following texts containing gestures and vocal exchanges between children and adults revealed were selected

because of the richness of relationship evidenced at this point of entry: both relationships existing in the nursery, between children and their peers and adult workers; and the implicit relationships from their home that are carried with them into the context of the nursery.

4.3.1 Text 5: Amos and Nathan

Context: The background to this fourth text is circle time. All the children are seated on the carpet. It will soon be time for lunch, when some children will be collected to go home. Cathy (deputy manager) is telling the story. I am sitting at the back of the group and observing. Two other adults, Sharon and Jackie are seated with the children. In this textual extract 2 year old Amos exhibits a special moment of care and concern for another child.

29 th June Narrative, non-participant observation 11.35-11.50	
<i>Transcript of observation</i>	<i>Field notes, reflection and interpretation</i>
<p>Nathan (3) leaves the seated group and goes to the toilet; but he doesn't return. I alert Sharon (staff member). Nathan appears in the doorway of the cloakroom, his pants and trousers appear to have become entwined together so he is unable to pull them up. He is very upset. Sharon immediately responds to his distress and accompanies him back into the cloakroom to help. She appears soon after.</p> <p>Nathan joins the other children on the carpet. Amos shows that he has noticed that Nathan is upset – he moves nearer to him and reaches out a hand.</p> <p>Nathan glances at Amos and there is</p>	<p><i>I reflected: A special moment of care and concern for another child by 2 year old Amos; the gesture of compassion and kindness which by a grateful glance is received by the older boy at his moment of shame.... A silent thank you.</i></p> <p>This gesture from Amos expressing understanding and empathy for Nathan's experience was offered and received without speaking. It was not noticed or recognised as significant by adults present.</p> <p><i>I later reflect on the silent connection between the two boys before Nathan rejoins</i></p>

communication between them.	<i>the other children on the carpet and engages with the story.</i>
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Interpretive reading

Through his gestures Amos communicates his sensitivity to Nathan's experience. The younger child's obvious concern and compassion for Nathan's embarrassment is spontaneous. It seems to come from within him and who he is. I reflect on how, at two years, Amos exhibits an empathic awareness and understanding of another child's feelings. Perhaps it is an expression of the natural capacity for spirituality that is ubiquitous to humanity? It is likely to have been shaped by his own personal history, experiences of kindness and compassion in his home environment. The awareness and understanding of the other expressed by Amos in this brief episode is interpreted as predominantly *relational* but the silent understanding expressed in intentional physical gesture between the children seems to mediate expression of a further spiritual dimension linked to *reflection* and meaning making. There seems also, in the silent connection shared between them, to be an acknowledgement that care has been offered and compassion expressed. I reflect that through his gestures Amos not only communicates sensitivity to Nathan's experience, but also expresses spontaneous affection for him.

Prior to attending the day nursery the children's relationships have been centred on those with significant caregivers - usually parents (mummy/daddy) but also aunties/uncles and grandparents. For some children relationships with siblings have also been significant. The 3 and 4 year old children often made reference in their conversations to family members by name or to recently experienced family events. Two episodes involving Rachel aged 3 years follow.

4.3.2 Texts 6 and 7: Rachel

Rachel attends the nursery every day. As acknowledged in Chapter 3 she was one of the first children to verbally acknowledge my visits and express a relational connection to me, referring to me by name and calling out to me on my arrival.

4.3.2.1 Week 4: 10th June (field notes):

It is 8.35 a.m. - the school children have yet to leave for school. Rachel (3) greets me as I arrive (Ayesha aged 5 is with her)

‘Hello Gill – Ayesha’s my best friend ... I was on holiday with my Mummy and Ayesha’.

I reflected in my field notes that in this brief exchange with me Rachel shares something of her identity beyond the nursery; her life with her Mummy and of relationships and experiences that are significant to her. It is part of ‘this is who I am’.

On several occasions I observed and recorded episodes when children’s key-workers interacted with children to comment or recall together a recent family event. In the following observed and recorded exchange between Sandra and 3 year old, Rachel, I include my reflections on the context, ethos and potential spiritual meaning.

Week 5: 16 th June 8.50-8.55 a.m - transcription of audio recording and field notes	
<i>Transcription of recording</i>	<i>Field notes, reflection and interpretation</i>
Rachel calls out ‘I haven’t done my bottle	

<p>yet... whoopsi Daisy!..'</p> <p>She moves to take one. 'I've chosen a pink bottle!'</p> <p>Sandra: 'like Annie?</p> <p>Rachel: 'Yes' ...</p> <p>Sandra continues in conversation – 'who's sleeping in your pink bedroom Rachel?'</p> <p>Rachel: 'Louisa! – she came on an aeroplane...!'</p> <p>Sandra explains to me that Louisa is a German exchange student.</p> <p>Rachel sits by role play area sees me and smiles; sings to herself whilst holding a book;</p>	<p><i>Sandra had been talking with Rachel's parent/carer... she extends a conversation from a knowledge of change in who is sleeping where in Rachel's home;</i></p> <p><i>Warm and friendly exchange – secure... a connecting or meeting place between home and nursery (2 layers of her environments); Rachel is known.</i></p>
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Interpretive reading

In this *relational* episode I reflect on how the adult (through her engagement with Rachel's parent/carer at a time unobserved by me) creates what I have called 'a connecting space' between Rachel's home context and her lived experience in the nursery. This space signifies a sense of connectedness and awareness of personal involvement with others, foundational to the development of belonging to a community where spirituality might be expressed and nurtured through relationships. The exchange between Rachel and Sandra reflects tenderness: the memories of family that Sandra engenders embody the warmth of being known and belonging to a community. These connections can also represent the bi-directional influences in meaning making as the children's different environments – home and nursery – intersect at different moments.

4.3.4 Texts 8 and 9: Amos

Of the five two year old children who participated in the study I only heard Amos (the youngest boy at 2 years 4 months at the start of the study) verbally refer to his mother.

4.3.4.1

In the following exchange, captured in my field notes, Amos has just arrived at the nursery with his mother. Cathy, (deputy manager of the nursery) who is Amos's key-worker, greets them at the door. Amos immediately runs over to the carpet; Cathy calls him back...

Week 4: 10 th June: 9.15 a.m. (field notes)	
Cathy: 'Amos, big kiss for Mummy?'	Amos runs, smiling, back to kiss his mother
Amos repeats: 'big kiss for Mummy!'	Mother and son kiss, his mother says goodbye and Amos runs back to the carpet

4.3.4.2

In this further episode Amos is playing in the role play area with his cousin Tom (only attended two sessions a week) and another 2 year old boy not participating in study. I recorded the following conversation/interaction as part of a longer observation:

Week 8: 6th July (9.25-9.34) Extract from recorded transcript

<i>Transcription of recording</i>	<i>Field notes, reflection and interpretation</i>
<i>Amos calls to the others: 'Tea time..... wake up time. Can I be mummy?'</i>	<i>Amos goes over to the dressing up box and selects a red Spanish flamenco dress.</i>
<i>Amos to researcher: ... 'you help me with my dress?</i>	I am seated at the dough table observing
<i>Researcher: 'I'll help you in a minute'; ok put your arm in... there's one, now the other one... that's it...</i>	I move towards Amos and hold the dress to enable him to insert his arms in the sleeves; Amos is smiling as he wears the red dress; he walks with difficulty as the dress is long over to the cooker and
<i>Tom: 'My go'...</i>	Tom finds another dress in the box and I assist him to put it on
<i>Staff member in the background shouts: Amos, what are you wearing; Amos you look stunning!</i> <i>Are you going to show ... indistinct....</i>	Amos is smiling but does not respond; I reflect <i>he has re-entered the narrative of his imagination.</i>
<i>Amos calls out: I'm Amos, it's me.... Wake up time,</i> He picks up the receiver of the telephone and says: <i>'It's my mummy – hello mummy.... Bye'</i>	As he holds the receiver he appears to be listening for a moment

Interpretive reading

In this short episode, which I situated as primarily *relational*, Amos constructs his own imaginary narrative in the nursery (where he spends much of each day) that connect his social experiences from other layers of his environment - family

(mummy) and everyday routines of his life e.g. 'tea-time' and 'wake up time'.

Perhaps being with his cousin was a prompt to this episode. He was reminded of an event – a special occasion they had both shared that involved everyone dressing up. I reflected on his agency in initiating the play and selecting his chosen dress. With the dress half on he calls to me for help and then, once dressed, immediately returns to his narrative. Amos gave no specific acknowledgement of the affirmation 'you look stunning' offered by a member of the nursery staff, other than his smile which might also be interpreted as a *reflective* moment related to meaning making of identity – a dimension of spirituality - an interpretation to himself of who he is as he articulates 'I'm Amos, it's me'.

4.4 Spirituality as creativity

Creativity has been explored in many ways in the literature (see Chapter 2.4). Defined - but not exemplified - in policy (e.g. NCC, 1993) as a facet of spiritual development, three discourses of creativity in young children - imaginative play, exploring possibilities and expressive and connecting representations - were considered as holding potential for recognition of spirituality. Within the episodes of the children's play and activity grouped predominantly within this area of behaviours, the following three texts were selected:

4.4.1 Text 10: Billy and Amos

Billy (2 years 10 months) and Amos (2 years 3 months) are playing with cars on the carpet. Billy has been coming to the nursery for six months and attends everyday. The texts include each child's transcribed verbal utterances, the observation of their gestures and actions and written reflections and comments about the episode.

Week 5: 16 June 2009 10.00-10.20 On the carpet (Observation, simultaneous digital recording, field notes)

<i>Text generated from transcript of audio recording, observation and field notes,</i>	<i>Reflection and interpretive comment</i>
<p>Billy plays on his own with the cars; he lies on the carpet; he has a car in his hand; as he moves the car he vocalises the sound of the car to himself: 'brrrm, brrrm..'</p> <p>Billy crashes the car into other cars – 'crashing' – vocalisation becomes louder - 'he's crashing into them...can't get out...' Billy laughs</p>	<p><i>Billy is totally absorbed. Although he knows I am there and observing there is no acknowledgement – he inhabits his own imaginative space.</i></p> <p><i>As he makes up his game Billy acts as if he is the car – imagining. The sounds he makes imitate a car's engine and through his actions he is 'being' the car. I wonder has he watched the Grand Prix (on TV or with family), experienced the excitement and seen cars crashing?</i></p>
<p>Amos comes over to carpet; Billy welcomes and accommodates this interruption to his play. The boys smile at each other;</p> <p>Together they put cars in garage – run them up the ramp... self-initiated activity –</p> <p>Amos: 'I've got a red car... la, la, la, la', Billy and Amos 'Ah, ah, ah, eeeeh,' 'Ah, ah, ah, eeeeh,...', their vocalisation is spontaneous – screeching rising to a crescendo;</p>	<p><i>I reflect on each boy's agency - each brings his own understanding, experiences and imagination to create and direct the game; they are collaborating in thinking what they can do as cars – a shared exploration in developing sounds for their cars.</i></p>
<p>They continue playing alongside each other - both hum and sing; no other interaction between the boys is observed now; Humming and singing...</p> <p>Amos moves over to the dinosaurs (also on carpet)</p> <p>Billy continues playing with the cars vocalising to himself; 'mmm, aah, mmm, aah...'</p>	<p><i>Listening later to the recording, I reflect on the happiness/exuberance expressed; how deeply satisfying Billy seems to have found this activity;</i></p>

<p>Amos returns to the cars and the boys again play together; they take turns to push cars up the ramp of the garage</p> <p>Amos sings: 'racing car, racing car you're going to go on there.. (indistinct)...' More singing and spontaneous vocalisation</p> <p>Amos 'Brmm, brmm, , Both laugh, Billy 'Brmm, brmm..' , Amos higher pitched screech: 'weeee..! . weeee..! '.</p>	<p><i>Shared exuberance</i></p>
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Interpretive reading

In this imaginative play episode both Billy and Amos demonstrate their agency. Billy chooses to be the car, acting as if he is the driver and mimicking the sounds the car makes as he drives it over the carpet and crashes it into other cars.

How do Billy and Amos know that these gestures and vocalisations are appropriate when playing with the cars? I reflected on whether Billy had watched a recent Grand Prix on TV? In creating a narrative around the cars both boys will have been influenced by personal experiences and memories beyond the nursery – whether through first hand experience or digital media. Here their *creativity* has links with relational within the pre-understanding framework. Has Billy seen other children playing with cars and is imitating them? Has he seen cars crashing on the TV or other digital media? Perhaps Billy plays within an imitative framework. Has he seen his parents drive their car? He imitates the car's movement with both gesture and vocalisation. Amos may have initially been drawn to play on the carpet because he sought social contact with Billy, or perhaps his curiosity was aroused by the older boy's imitative vocalisation of the car crashing.

Initially Billy acts as if he is the car, but from time to time he switches to a different mode, where he stands back from ‘inhabiting’ the car, or being the driver, to explore what else the car might do or be capable of, such as driving it up the ramp in the garage. Amos and Billy interact in this possibility thinking. Their momentary exploration in brief collaborative play widens the horizon of possibility as they connect through shared enjoyment (they smile at each other, accepting the interaction) and together, as they put the cars in the garage, move from a more somatic ‘inhabiting’ of the car to a more intentional exploration of ‘what if.’ The ‘inhabiting’ of the car by Billy as if he ‘is’ the car through gesture and vocalised imitative engine noises (‘brmm’) is representative of how in socio-cultural contexts the objects, in this instance the cars, become cultural tools for mediating meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003).

4.4.2 Text 11: Esther

Context: The text below is based on a seven minute observation of Esther (2 years, 3 months) playing in the role play area. Esther has only recently started attending the nursery for three sessions a week. Two other children are playing close-by in the area but Esther plays alone.

Week 4: 10th June 2009 In the role play area (Observation + Field notes) 11.00-11.07	
Observation and field notes	Reflection and interpretive comments
Esther is standing next to the ‘cooker’ and cupboard. She holds a mixing bowl with her left arm and is stirring objects in the bowl with a wooden spoon held in her right hand;	<i>Esther is absorbed in the activity; she is aware I am there but is not distracted.</i> <i>She is concentrating on the task; she is a competent player; the bowl is held securely against her body and she stirs purposively;</i>

<p>She puts the bowl down and selects 'foods' from an egg box placed on the cupboard.</p> <p>Each item chosen is carefully placed in bowl; she shakes the box and turns round.</p>	<p><i>In the egg box are 2 plastic eggs, a small wooden brick and assorted plastic vegetables; I notice how carefully she selects items</i></p>
<p>She stirs the items in the bowl again, then puts it down on the cooker – she looks at me, smiles and moves away from the role play area.</p>	<p><i>Esther completes her task; I reflect on whether it is the connections remembered with home - of who she is and what she can do - that has made this a significant activity for her – self-affirming;</i></p>

In this solitary imaginative and creative episode Esther does not speak; she is one of the youngest children in the nursery and has only been attending for two weeks. In this role play she imitates what she has perhaps witnessed at home. Is she remembering a recent cooking activity with a parent or her sister? Was it observed or did she participate? She has probably drawn on existing knowledge and skills from home. As she selects different 'foods' Esther appears to pose her own 'what if' questions as she independently initiates possibilities for the ingredients of her 'cake'. I suggest her demeanour throughout this episode demonstrates her individual agency. She has chosen and initiated the activity to which she brings a competence and confidence likely to have been gained from social and cultural learning in her home.

I situated this self-initiated imaginative episode primarily as related to spirituality as *creativity* but dimensions of *relational* connections to Esther's home and significant relationships and experiences within that environment – such as the preparation of food - are also evident; this solitary imaginative enactment seems also to help Esther to interpret to herself who she is – a dimension of spirituality as *reflection* in the meaning making of identity.

I capture her concentration and absorption in a photo. Esther did not speak at all in this episode but brought an observed competence and confidence (likely to have been gleaned from participation in, and observation of, similar experiences in her home) to an imaginative and creative activity in the nursery that connected her to her home and relationships within that environment.

4.4.3 Text 12: Kirsty and Kirsten

Here two girls - Kirsty (K1) (3 yrs 8 months) and Kirsten (K2) (3 yrs 6 months) - make up a reciprocal song as they busy themselves role playing the preparation and serving of food. Rachel (3 years 2 months) is playing alongside them and Billy (2 years 10 months) is also present in the area. It is a very hot day. To create some shade, the nursery practitioners have erected a tent made of sheets to cover the role play area.

Week 3: 1 st June, 2009 Outdoors under tented area – Transcribed audio recording and observation 11.00-11.15 a.m.	
Transcript of audio recording and field notes	Reflection and interpretive comments
<p>The girls are standing by the cooker which has 2 pans on it;</p> <p>K2: 'Are you busy with your mother? 'Can I have one chip please? – one chip gone now'</p>	<p>The girls refer to 'your mother' – it is not clear to me who (if anyone) is taking the role – I reflect <i>that 'mother' seems a person of significance.</i></p>
<p>K1: Ishy, wishy? Both girls laugh...</p> <p>K2: 'Lovely.... La, la, la, la, la – la, la, la, la, la, la, la there's your one; do you take sugar?</p> <p>K1: All of the mudcakes in there...' Their vocalisation rises to a crescendo</p>	<p>Rhythmic vocalisation extends to singing of the question re the sugar... Both girls take turns; Spontaneous vocalisation; a shared moment – which is fun/enjoyable</p>
Rachel imitates the song and attempts to	I wonder if the tune or sounds are familiar

<p>join in.</p> <p>R. There's an egg here, la, la, la nice cup of tea? The other girls ignore her and she stops singing but stays watching and listening.</p> <p>Kirsty returns to the earlier refrain – <i>Ishy, wishy, wa</i>; She adds an additional phrase to extend the refrain.</p> <p>K1: 'Ishy, wishy, wa... Ishy, wishy, wa, ishy, wishy, wish wa, ishy, wishy wish wa'</p>	<p>from a TV programme – unknown to me?</p> <p>I reflect how much she is enjoying creating this 'song' – exploring and experimenting with the possibilities of rhythm and sound.</p>
<p>Together Kirsty and Kirsten chant the 'song' they have composed while playing together: –</p> <p>'Ishy, wishy,wa, ishy, wishy wa, ishy, wishy, wish wa, ishy, wishy wish wa'</p> <p>They smile at each other as they sing:</p>	<p>I reflect on how this playful exploration of sounds and words emerges from self-initiated</p> <p>role play; it seems to be an emotionally satisfying and meaningful episode for both.</p>

Interpretive reading

This playful spontaneous vocalisation emerges from self-initiated imaginative role - play; as with Esther the episode is linked to preparation and serving of food and creates connections with significant relationships ('your mother'), competences and experiences that each brings to the nursery environment. Situated primarily as *creative*, this shared rhythmic communicative activity between Kirsty and Kirsten seems to demonstrate and mark a *relational* connection and intimacy between them. The girls play with ideas and possibilities, sounds and words as together they compose an innovative musical rhyme that seems to spill out into the humorous (embodied in the laughter between them) narrative they create. The connectedness in their thinking in the game is perhaps linked to their shared cultural experiences mediated through TV or video outside of the nursery. I reflect on whether they have done this before as

the ease and familiarity with which they engage together exhibits a mutual trust. The creation of the musical rhyme was emotionally satisfying and personally meaningful to them both. I reflected that perhaps it was Kirsty and Kirsten's friendship and familiarity – they had both been attending the nursery for over six months – that prevented them from extending their exchange to acknowledge, or include, Rachel's contribution. They did not know her enough to trust her or perhaps they were caught up in their own creative endeavour. However the younger girl did not protest and remained present, observing and smiling at their fun. It was my own sensing that she had wanted to join in – nothing was said. Perhaps even as an observer of Kirsty and Kirsten's collaborative creative play Rachel had not been prevented from entering their imaginative space.

4.5 Spirituality as Transcendence

The fourth area of behaviour categorised in the literature – (see Chapter 2.4.2) - as related to expression of spirituality is transcendence, or experiencing awe and wonder and mystery (e.g. NCC, 1993). As I discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3), in the response from a key contributor to the draft EYFS (DfES, 2006) framework, and Chair of the meeting, to a comment that spiritual development seemed to be missing from the draft document, immediate reference was made to 'awe and wonder'; and the practitioners I surveyed in my pre-doctoral study (Goodliff, 2006), (see 1.4), indicated a strong association of awe and wonder to their understanding of spirituality.

I was therefore expecting to find in my data many episodes from the two and three year old children's play, where through their gestures, vocalisation or actions, experiences of awe and wonder (transcendent moments) might be recognised. When scrutinising the detailed descriptions of behaviours within the documented texts

however, it became apparent that transcendence expressed as awe and wonder and mystery did not appear as a predominant area of behaviour and the text presented below was the sole episode analysed and interpreted as predominantly transcendent.

4.5.1 Text 13: releasing the butterflies

Context: The release of the butterflies occurred on my second visit to the nursery. It was half-term week and only eight nursery children were present. A further ten children (aged 4-10 years) were participating in the nursery-facilitated holiday Playscheme held in the adjacent school premises. The children had previously observed the caterpillars eating, developing and changing to cocoon and then emerging as butterflies. Their cage was situated in an accessible position, magnifiers were available for the children to observe the life cycle and various representations, photographs and children’s pictures of this had been previously documented.

Week 2: 27 th May, 2009 (Field notes and journal)	
Field notes and journal entries	Reflection and interpretive comments
11.30 a.m. Sandra rings over to Cathy who is working with the Playscheme for the week and suggests she meets us on the field to release the butterflies.	<i>There is excitement amongst the nursery children as coats and hats are put on.</i> <i>There is a sense of anticipation.</i>
Sandra carries the cage containing the	For Deborah and Gemma (both 3 years) there is the added excitement of meeting

butterflies.	up with their older siblings for this event.
<p>Cathy assumes responsibility for releasing the butterflies. She discusses the lifecycle and recaps the changes the children have observed over time. The children gather round as Cathy opens the cage to release the five butterflies. 'They don't want to go!' Ryan (4) says as we watch the butterflies. 'Why don't they fly away?'</p>	<p><i>Amos (2 yrs) jumps up and down. They wonder what will happen.</i></p>
<p>One butterfly sits on Cathy's hand and another one flies away and then returns and lands on her back. 'Shake your hand' says Rachel (3 yrs). Cathy shook her hand. The butterfly remained for a few seconds and then it fluttered away. A few of the older children run after butterflies that have flown towards the hedge.</p>	<p><i>I notice Gemma is standing with her sister watching. The freedom of the butterflies brings delight – the children seem pleased when eventually they have all flown away.</i></p>

Interpretive reading

I reflected that this adult initiated activity offered the children the opportunity to appreciate an aspect of the natural world in which they live; the beauty of the butterflies, their shape, colour and life. I situated this episode predominantly as a *transcendent* moment because of the sense of observed wonder present in the youngest children as they experience this event for the first time. Their gaze was transfixed on Cathy and the butterfly cage - the children were absorbed and caught up in the moment. Amos and Rachel's curiosity and excitement about what would happen to the butterflies was evident. This episode seemed also to be *creative* because of the sense of adventure generated through the preparation for the journey with the butterflies and the creation of an opportunity for thinking and connecting. Rachel's suggestion to Cathy to shake her hand perhaps indicating her exploration of 'what if?' and absorption in what she was witnessing – that awareness of being in the moment, the here and now, that may be linked to the spiritual. I reflected, too, that this episode was also *relational* providing the opportunity for Deborah and Gemma to share this experience with their older siblings. In my journal I noted their obvious pleasure at meeting up with their sisters and their positioning of themselves next to them as they observed and chatted (unheard) together during the release of the butterflies; something perhaps to discuss at home.

So far this chapter has presented the thirteen texts selected as the focus for hermeneutic reflection and analysis. In the next section a review of the analytical process and an overview of the findings of this study, in relation to young children's expressions of spirituality, is outlined.

4.6 Overview of Findings

The aim of this study was to understand how two and three year old children express spirituality. Underpinned by a socio-cultural view of the child (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1990, 2003), introduced in Chapter 1 and further discussed in Chapters 2 (2.2) and 3 (3.2), multi-modal data were collected using tools based on the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) that acknowledges the competency of participants and was specifically developed to listen to young children's views (see Chapter 3.5). As previously discussed (3.8.5), the four areas of behaviours (relating to my pre-understanding of dimensions of spirituality) - relational, reflective, creative and transcendent - were used to deductively organise all the documented data (texts), and with the thirteen selected texts presented in this chapter, to enter a hermeneutic (interpretive) conversation with the children's expressions. The following sub-section offers an overview of the findings that emerged from the interpretive reading (conversation) following each of the thirteen vignettes (texts).

4.6.1 Summary of analysis and findings

Table 4.1, below, shows how the thirteen selected texts were analysed: the left hand column, *Entry to data*, illustrates the deductive analysis of texts within a predominant area of behaviour, whilst the narrative comment below each of the horizontally presented columns of '*Expressions*' reflects the insight and complexity of meaning (inductive analysis) that emerged from the hermeneutic dialogue with the potential expressions of spirituality 'heard' within the children's discursive spaces (Moss and Petrie, 2002). The numbers in brackets refer to the number of the text(s).

Dimensions of spirituality as:				
Entry to data	Expressions of Reflection	Expressions of Relationship	Expressions of Creativity	Expressions of Transcendence
Reflection (meaning making – identity)	Being me – uninhibited delight in being expressed in spontaneous physical action (unique to individual);(1,3) Stillness;(2) Chuffed – self recognition (2,3) Remembering;(4)	Warmth and trust/friendship; reciprocal gestures (1) Silent exchange through smile and eyes; (2) Spontaneous physical connection (4)	Imagination (enacted) (2); Self-vocalisation;(3) Embodied expression of feelings (3); Day dream (imaginative space) (4)	Inner connection to achievement beyond present;(2,3) Curiosity/awe and wonder (4)
Close and significant relationships	Silent connection (witness) (5) 'I'm me' (9)	Sensitivity to other (5); Kindness, compassion (5) Empathic awareness/understanding (5) Intentional physical gesture (5) Warmth/tenderness (5, 6, 7) Connecting space (6, 7, 8, 9) home/family-nursery	Imaginary narrative (agency) (9)	
Creativity	Remembering/interpreting who I am (11)	Spontaneous vocalisation connects;(10) Connection to home relationships/experiences – prep of food; (11,12) Connection and intimacy; (12) Friendship (trust)	Imaginative play (10,11) Creative narrative; (10,11) Acting as if; Embodied exploring possibilities; Intentional exploration of what if through gesture/vocalisation (somatic) (10) Solitary imaginative play (11) Imaginative, collaborative vocalisation (12)	
Transcendence		Shared experience; (13)	Here and now moment; exploration of what if (13)	Wonder of new experience; (13) Appreciation of beauty of butterflies (13)

Table 4.1 Summary analysis and findings from 13 selected texts

In summary, there were four main findings.

Ubiquity

First, premised on the understanding of spirituality as **ubiquitous**, the broad areas of behaviour identified from the literature (see 3.8.5), are present in these children aged two and three. This concordance between the framework (Fig. 3.1) established in the methodology, and the findings (Table 4.1) are expressed primarily in the language of the everyday. Present are **relationships** (including connectedness to others, the expression of kindness and compassion, through physical gesture); **reflection** (including meaning making of identity, chuffedness and, moments of remembering and stillness); **creativity** (where fantasy and possibilities are explored, sometimes through embodied or somatic expression); and **transcendence**, although relatively infrequently.

Multi-dimensional

Second, it is apparent from the analysis that the dimensions of spiritual expression/experience present were not discrete, or isolated from one another. In every case there is a **rich multi-faceted expression**, such that, for example, in episodes identified predominantly as *reflective*, dimensions of spirituality linked to relationship, creativity and transcendence are also 'heard'; and for episodes identified primarily as *creative*, elements of spirituality linked to reflection and relationship are also expressed. Indeed, the most commonly present expression (evident in each of the selected texts) is spirituality linked to relationship.

Relational, imaginative and narrative spaces

Thirdly, the context of the expressions identified is almost always child initiated imaginative play. These spaces (Moss and Petrie, 2002) are rich sources of

opportunity for the expression of relationship, both present and imaginatively carried from elsewhere (relationships with other children or staff at the nursery, or significant relationships carried from, say, home by the children), and it is most especially mediated through intentional physical gestures or acknowledgements of friendship and compassionate care. Here also is the way in which they construct meanings of their identity and the day-to-day experiences of life; and through imaginative narrative express their innate creativity. It could be argued that for two and three year olds, the predominant space for dimensions of spiritual expression is imaginative play.

Transcendence

Finally, and most surprisingly, is the relative absence of that expression of spirituality that is commonly voiced in both literature and policy documents: transcendence. I have noted already how quickly the expression of spirituality has been identified with 'awe and wonder,' and in this nursery context, with anticipation of observing children's 'magic moments' (Chapter 3.7). This was not widely observed, or frequently expressed, in the selected texts analysed. The possible reasons for this are explored in greater detail in Chapter 5, but in summary are likely to be one, or a combination, of, (i) the lack of transcendence as an expression of spirituality in this age group; (ii) the rarity of expression (it is an infrequent expression not easily captured during the observation period); (iii) its interiority of expression, that means it is not easily observed even when present and (iv) transcendence itself is a much more commonplace and everyday experience in children of this age group, who are continually living at the edge of their abilities and experience, and so 'transcend' their experiences all the time.

While much of these findings confirms what might be expected, based on other's research (and which shaped my pre-understanding), these findings, notwithstanding

the limitations of sample size, suggest a significant re-positioning of the means by which spirituality is expressed in this age group as distinct from older children. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 Discussion of findings

‘Spirituality is like a bird if you hold it too tightly it chokes, if you hold it too loosely it flies away. Fundamental to spirituality is the absence of force’

(Rabbi Hugo Gryn, 1993, p.4)

5.1 Introduction

Premised on the central construct of spirituality as ubiquitous, the four areas of behaviour (Fig. 3.1) – relational, creativity, reflection and transcendent - frame the discussion in this chapter of what the data shows about ‘how two and three year olds express spirituality’ just as they framed the analysis in Chapter 4. The analysis indicated broad coherence with the literature but also pushed the boundaries of understanding in relation to the potential in very young children’s play and activities for mediating expressions of spirituality. In this stage of the research argument, therefore, I integrate the literature that informed the development of the four dimensions of spirituality with the identified findings. The aim of the synthesis and discussion in this chapter is to examine the adequacy of the four broad dimensions of spirituality interpreted in the episodes for representing the multi-lingual nature of expressions of spirituality by two and three year olds. This forms a further stage in the hermeneutic conversation (Gadamer, 2000) where, in a middle space, the researcher extends the dialogical engagement (Hyde, 2005) with the text, representing the socio-cultural context that the child and researcher speaks and acts within.

5.2 Ubiquity

While the four previously articulated behaviours were used to analyse the specific character of spirituality in these young children, the wider assertion that spirituality is

ubiquitous is also tested here. In addition, the broad character of that ubiquity, and its expression in two and three year olds, is examined.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Bone (2007) locates the spiritual in 'everyday life', a concept drawn from socio-cultural and social constructivist perspectives, and rooted in Mayol's (1998) description of cultural practice as, 'The more or less coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday... or ideological... at once coming from a tradition (that of a family or social group) and reactualized from day to day across behaviours translating fragments of this cultural device into social visibility....' (p.9, cited in Bone, 2007, p. 143). She writes,

My recognition of everyday spirituality came to me when I was observing children and teachers and suddenly realised that I was trying to capture much of what was happening right in front of me. It gradually became clear that spirituality was something I could connect with when I stopped hoping for miracles or worrying that I would miss the signs of inner enlightenment. It seemed that most of the events that were unfolding before me were inextricably part of everyday life and also reflected spirituality...The spiritual and the everyday inhabit the same space but the spiritual is able to transform the everyday and move it beyond the mundane.' (Bone, 2007, p. 141)

These elements, or practices, 'are concerned with identity within networks of social relations' and it is through these that Bone sees the spiritual, '...my experience was also always being filtered through ... the lived existentials of spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality...These existentials anchor the spiritual' (Bone, 2007, p. 143). Similarly, in the selected texts analysed and interpreted from my wider data, it is the everyday existence in the nursery that provides the lens through which the spiritual is discerned. The children's spirituality and spiritual expression in the nursery has been shaped by their background and experiences, but also actively contributes to understanding and meaning making situated in the nursery. For example, playing in the role play area, on the mat with cars, an exchange of kindness towards another child who was upset. These places of engagement and experiences (Wenger, 1998) in

the nursery become the spaces through which these young children form their image of the world and their sense of identity and within which their spirituality is situated. I argue therefore that the documented instances and occasions of imaginative play and everyday human exchange involving thinking, feeling and imagining, became spaces where the children expressed dimensions of spirituality. This partly explains why, as indicated in Chapter 4, moments of transcendence, traditionally understood in a narrower sense as moments of spiritual extension (i.e. awe and wonder and mystery), were largely absent. It is not an everyday experience, and perhaps only very occasionally expressed by two and three year olds. However, there are tangential expressions of this understanding of transcendence even in the everyday, the ubiquitous context for the spiritual in very young children living '...at the limit of their experiences most of the time' (Berryman, 1985, p.126) as they transcend boundaries of competence and experience, and achieve more today than they were able yesterday, so that the ability to transcend other boundaries becomes a possibility.

It is argued then, in line with Bone (2005), that spirituality exists in the spaces created by everyday routines and activities for the very young child: preparing food, or playing with a friend, for instance. Spirituality for young children normally does not exist in spaces reserved for religious activity, for instance, or only in moments of highly charged spiritual experience beyond the normal run of everyday events. Similarly, Eaude (2005) concludes that spiritual development is 'embedded in everyday practice and yet often remarkable... yet too elusive quite to be pinned down.' (p.245) This was demonstrated by the following episodes observed and recorded in Gateway Heath nursery: Esther cooking possibly imitating what she has witnessed at home (Text 10), Kirsty and Kirsten by the cooker preparing food and making tea before they compose their 'song' (Text 11) and Billy (Text 2) on the carpet building a tower of bricks. Whilst Bone (2005) and Eaude (2005) point to

spirituality existing in spaces created by everyday activities, my findings suggest that in this age group imaginative play utilising creative narrative is most significant.

In contrast to my study, Bone's (2007) research contexts - a Steiner School, a Montessori School and a Christian Private Pre-school - all recognized (although in different ways) children's spirituality as part of a holistic view of the child. The ideology underpinning the practices in each are more explicitly spiritual than my research context, which was specifically chosen to have no obvious religious or ideological affiliation. It could be argued that the indigenous influence of the Maori culture on Te Whariki, the New Zealand early childhood education curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) has also acknowledged the spiritual to a greater extent than in the UK (although Bone notes how rapidly that is being eroded). Bone's (2007) research, with an age group that extended to much older children than mine, although using participant observation in regard to the youngest children, included interview and reflection with teachers and parents as well.

Here, in the day nursery, the 'everyday' was all. If expressions of spirituality were to be recognised at all in this context, it would be in the children's active participation in the everyday, the routine, the ordinary, where spirituality was observed through gesture, imagination and the repetition of the mundane. De Certeau (1984) likens everyday life to walking a city: there are many ways of describing a city by maps or guides, but it is the everyday experience of walking where the citizen claims back their city from the manipulators and profiteers, '*wandersmanners*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it' (de Certeau, 1984, p.93). In a similar way, the young children in my study through the mediation of actual lived everyday life, express and construct their spirituality through languages not solely reliant on vocal articulation, and without 'reading it' as

such. One might argue, they 'walk' their spirituality rather than be 'taught it', in the way that de Certeau (1984) sees the citizen 'walk' their city rather than be 'taught' it through map or city guide. As Hay and Nye (2006) discovered while attempting to identify common characteristics of spirituality, the fundamental individuality of each child underlay the attempts to make sense of the spirituality of the child.

'The process began with attention to each child's conversation as a case study in its own right. Reflecting on the insights gained from this approach, it became clear that children's spirituality could not be divorced from their individuality. Attending to the personal style and idiosyncratic preoccupations of each child often revealed a 'signature' or key that unlocked the layers of meaning otherwise hidden from the naïve listener.' (ibid, p.107)

This individuality was also a feature of this research with younger children. Accessing the meaning making of two and three year old children came not through conversation but through attending to the children's posture, gestures, actions, gaze and vocalisations. For young children spoken language is not the primary tool for mediating their thinking and learning (Vygotsky, 1978), but the episodes reflect glimpses of a unique signature for each child. For instance, Amos on several occasions expresses delight through physicality (e.g. Text 1). 'This is me', his skip and a jump seemed to say. Esther, while being of a similar age to Amos, is much quieter. She says little or nothing, (Text 11) but does talk to herself (Text 3). A newcomer to the nursery she seems less interactive, more introspective, yet even when no one else sees her she is prepared to delight in her own achievements for her own benefit. Spirituality is not easily explained in words but to draw on the quote that opens this chapter (Gryn, 1993), fundamental to its expression is that it is not forced; it is unique to each child and its presence is constructed and mediated through their everyday life.

5.3 Spirituality as reflection – meaning making

I turn now to discuss the data of episodes that I associated primarily with reflection - the meaning making of individual experience. When Billy builds and completes his tower of bricks (Text 2) I reflected that it seemed to be a ‘wow’ moment for him – ‘a look what I can do/have done’, moment; a special moment for him of self-recognition. I interpreted the meaningfulness of this achievement through his stance and facial expression as ‘chuffedness’. ‘Chuffedness’ (Trevarthen, 2005) is an expression of delight in a task accomplished or an achievement that is self-recognised and then shared – ‘knowing how to do something others will admire’ (ibid, p.98). There is something about the recognition of that achievement, while essentially self-recognized, that is heightened when shared by others. It was my presence with a camera that enabled Billy to express his own self-delight, shared with me. Trevarthen (2005, p.99) argues that ‘[S]uch ‘social self-confidence’ depends on the sense of security with meanings and actions...’ and is linked to the child’s social identity. In terms of a child’s spirituality, such shared moments deepen foundations of trust, self-awareness and connectedness with the other (Hay and Nye, 2006) – a dimension of ‘relational consciousness’. In Text 3, I interpreted two-year-old Esther as expressing ‘chuffedness’ when, having climbed up the slope of the slide, she jumps up and down and calls ‘Ooh! Ooh!’ For her no adult responds or acknowledges Esther’s own vocalized self-achievement or enjoyment of the moment. This episode of ‘chuffedness’ does not have the same sense of a shared moment as that described previously with Billy. One of the stated goals of early years practice articulated in the original EYFS (DCSF, 2008) - statutory at the time of data collection – and the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012), is to foster children’s well-being (see Chapter 2) which, I argue, must include a spiritual dimension alongside physical and emotional. Emotional well-being (Laevers, 1997) involves essentially a strong sense of personal

identity (this is who I am) and self-esteem (who I am is good), both of which lie somewhere near the core of early spiritual awareness. The socio-cultural view of the child adopted in this research recognizes the child's active participation in meaning making, the child is agentic in constructing and co-constructing their spirituality and how they express it in their lives. The notion of 'chuffedness' as an expression of two and three year olds' spirituality might be linked to the spiritual mode of being that Champagne (2003) calls 'existential' referring to children's '...relation to time and space and to the relation to existence itself through daily activities' (p.44), but the '...spontaneous dimensions of children's activities...' (ibid, p.51) she relates to this mode omits such a link. Champagne's (2003) research was with 3-6 year olds, so it might be argued that 'chuffedness', the expression of delight, is a new, further dimension of spirituality expressed by 2 and 3 year olds.

5.4 Spirituality as Creativity

Documented episodes of the children's imaginative and creative play, interpreted predominantly through the lens of creativity, are now discussed. Although I entered the data through one area of behaviour, I found that within most texts other dimensions of spirituality could also be interpreted. As discussed below this was particularly the case for creativity where *relational*, *reflection* and *transcendent* moments were revealed.

The creativity literature reviewed in Chapter 2, highlights how creativity, like spirituality, has multiple meanings. In texts 9, 10 and 11, interpreted as primarily creative, I reflected on the personal agency of each of the children in these imaginative play episodes that exemplifies the everyday expressions of creativity within little 'c' creativity (Craft, 2002). For example, Billy (Text 9) chooses to play

with the cars, and inhabits a narrative he constructs for himself; his imagining is '...an intentional act of mind;' (Egan, 1992, p.3). Similarly Esther (Text 10) uses the objects in the role play area to initiate her imaginative cooking activity, carefully selecting different foods to mix in her bowl, and both children create stories in imaginative ways that are meaningful and construct meaning for them (Egan, 1992). The children's play, on the carpet with the cars and in the role play area is rooted in the socio-cultural context in which they are situated and the objects they use in imaginative play mediates the thinking and creating connected to the wider social and family contexts familiar to them (Rogoff, 2003).

Imaginative play also offers a potentially 'sacred' space (Winnicott, 1971) for the individual. When (Text 9) Amos briefly moves to another area of the carpet, Billy seems to be in his own solitary imaginative space – his quieter, reflective humming suggesting he is inhabiting his own private space for a few moments, an inner world that is personally meaningful (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007). The solitary imaginative space, viewed as sacred is a private space Esther inhabits (Text 10) 'in which fantasy, daydreams, reflections, thoughts, meditations, anxieties find form in our consciousness' (Trotman, 2006, p.5).

Through their play the children explore possibilities, acting for example 'as if' they are cars; they create 'what if I' scenarios, and ask questions of their cultural contexts stimulated by their fantasy games and imaginative play. Billy (Text 9) seems to ask 'what if the car crashes?' for instance, and with Amos collaborates in what perhaps are brief moments of *transcendence* where one or both boys sees something in a new way (Phenix, 1975; Berryman, 1985). The creative play is also conducted in the interplay between relationships, such as Billy and Amos' collaboration (Text 9), or Esther's connection to the family home in which cooking is an everyday activity, and

moments of inner reflection, the child drawn into him or herself as processes of inner reflection, PT or meaning making. Although not articulated, Esther (Text 10), by acting as if she is the cook or in charge, by exploring the 'ingredients' before her and selecting 'foods', she appears to pose, if only momentarily 'what if?' questions that underpin the notion of creativity as PT (Craft, 2002; Burnard et al., 2006). Through this activity in the nursery she seems to make connections with her home and the significant relationships and experiences within that environment. This connection to a special person (her mother or perhaps a sibling) gives meaning and purpose to her work here and is, I argue, an expression of her spirituality. It is evidence of the bi-directional (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) influence of Esther's 'ecological niche' (David, 1998, p.18) intersecting the two environments and creating a space for moments of imaginative role playing which express to the observer 'who I am'. Through narrative and embodied communication, Wright (2011, p.163) citing Geertz (1971), asserts children enter into an interpretive space where they can 'tell themselves about themselves' (Geertz, 1971, p.26). This silent episode of imaginative play thus becomes a means of helping Esther to interpret to herself her own identity, to make sense of those questions of ultimate significance, such as who am I, what am I, who are you, or what is the world like?

Young children's search for meaning is situated in all their everyday encounters and experiences, at home and in the nursery. As Bone et al., (2007) state such ordinary everyday events as preparation and serving of food can ... 'take on a different feeling when they are imbued with the spiritual.' (Bone et al., 2007, p.348). As Billy and Amos (Text 9) played together I reflected that their enjoyment and exuberance seemed palpable. The spontaneous vocalisation of humming and singing together, and alone, is calming and soothing (Young, 2006), and music as a form of communication can be a conduit for spiritual expression (Duffy, 2006). The creativity of PT is

observed in the context of children's immersive (Chappell, 2008) and collaborative play (Craft et al., 2012). Billy and Amos (Text 10) act as if they are cars, and in their actions and exchanges pose questions that evidence 'what if' thinking' (Craft, 2002), a feature of PT and somatic knowing (Egan, 1992), which through engaging the mind, body and soul (Wright, 2011) allows possibilities for embodied expression of spirituality.

These episodes demonstrate what the literature discusses, and show how they are vignettes primarily articulating creativity, but linked in a secondary way also to relationality, transcendence and reflection within the discourse of spirituality. That the episodes of imaginative play are ones of creativity is clear, but are they also means by which spirituality is expressed? I have argued that in this age group, spirituality is expressed through everyday play and interactions. In older children, where the empirical spirituality literature has the widest focus, speech is a predominant mode of expression and it is through conversation with the children that researchers identify a distinct relatedness to others, transcendence (mystery), the exploring of questions of identity and experience (Hay and Nye, 1998; Erricker et al., 1997; Hyde, 2005) and creativity (Champagne, 2003; Fraser and Grootenboer, 2004). In two and three year olds for whom imaginative narrative is a primary means of discourse and articulation of their inner world, the same facets of spirituality are present.

5.5 Spirituality as Relationality

The relational lens through which I interpreted the spirituality of these children is widely acknowledged as significant by others who have researched spirituality in older children (Hay and Nye, 1998; McCreery, 1996; Champagne, 2003). Champagne (2003) includes the relational amongst her three spiritual modes of being. For her,

perhaps because of the developmental approach underpinning her study, the relational mode of being of young children (3-6 years) focuses on elements of their interpersonal relationships with both adults and children that confirm ‘...their *being-related* (emphasis in original) and actively participate in their own becoming’ (ibid, p.50).

Those who adopt a developmental perspective to the child, rather than a socio-cultural one, describe spirituality as ‘a developmental wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, *connectedness to others* (my emphasis) and the sacred...’

(Roehlkepartain, Benson, King and Wagener, 2006, p. 5, cited in Bone, 2007, p.34).

However, I have explored the current relational element, not just as a prelude to the spiritual, or something that enables its possibility, but rather as concrete expressions of the child’s own, current spirituality. Wright (2000) interprets this relatedness as ‘concerned with children’s sense of identity, their place in the world, in society, and in the ultimate order of things’ (p.43). This stance of meaning making through participation in different social contexts was the starting point for my doctoral study.

Are some kinds of relationship more apparent than others in this age group in their nursery context? The connection with other children while at the nursery seemed to be more immediate than that with staff, or parents. Most of the episodes analysed were between children, or with children playing alone. It cannot be that overall, these peer relationships are most significant to the child, but in this context (representing, in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory, the micro-system), they are the more immediate. Arguably for children in a daycare context there is not the explicit emphasis on meeting learning outcomes imposed by the school curriculum, and which require greater interaction with adults, although concern has been raised (House, Osgood and Simpson, 2012) about the inappropriate cognitive learning and auditing specified in the Revised Statutory EYFS (DfE, 2012). Instead the children had many opportunities to initiate and create exploratory and imaginative play alone or with

others. So, Billy and Amos playing together (text 9), or Kirsty and Kirsten in the role play area at the cooker (text 1), are significant encounters. However, even in these interactions between children, the memory of other relationships, with parents, for instance, are also present. This may be a sign of another dimension to the relational expression of spirituality, the immediacy of a created connecting space (for example Rachel and Sarah in Text 7) combining personal memory with the warmth of being known and belonging to the community of the nursery. Because it is in the everyday, the immediate, that these children express their spirituality, it is likely to be the most immediate of relationships at the nursery through which that is expressed, and those are predominantly with other children or a key worker.

In the interaction between Kirsten and Kirsty (Text 1), playing together indoors in the role play area, their delight in one another's company was evident. I noted the connection between them; they were friends. In the same episode Amos watches them, and seems to express exuberant delight as he does so. Is his delight in himself making a connection with their friendship by observing it? He seems pleased that they are friends, rather than wanting to intrude upon their play, or feel excluded and sad. Amos seems very contained within his own being, able to delight in others without wishing to own their pleasure for himself. This is an extraordinary degree of emotional security for this two year old child, and in itself a sign of his own spiritual existence in relation to others. It should be noted that he is the child who shows compassion to Nathan, as discussed below.

It was also only Amos who I observed interacting directly with his parent (text 7). As he arrives with his mother, he immediately leaves her and runs to the carpet. His key worker calls him back, "Amos, big kiss for Mummy?", which he repeats as he returns and kisses her goodbye. Is it the security between parent and child that enables Amos

to feel secure within the nursery, and he himself does not require the 'kiss gesture' to disconnect? Note that it is the key worker who calls him back. It is perhaps this depth of parent-child relationship that enables Amos to delight in other's friendship without needing to take it over or intrude upon it, and to express concern for others. When he was recorded playing on 6 June (text 8) it was his mother who he imagined talking to on the telephone, "It's my mummy... hello mummy... Bye."

Hay with Nye (1998) using grounded theory, teased out the concept of relational consciousness. This core concept for Nye explored how the child relates to 'things, other people, him/herself, and God' (p.113). For the children in my research, younger than Nye's cohort by some margin, the relationships are with 'things' through imaginative play (Billy building his tower of bricks, or playing with the cars), other children, other adults, including me as the researcher, and also with their own selves, their own self-identity as they find meaning for themselves. I argue that through these relationships the spirituality of the child is expressed in concrete exchanges and encounters.

Of particular interest is the capacity for kindness or compassion. In the exchange explored in text 4, where Amos expresses kindness to the distressed Nathan through the simple gesture of reaching out his hand when Nathan returns to the carpet, expressing acceptance, kindness and friendship, this was apparently not done in any way to seek adult approval. Indeed, adults present did not notice the gesture, but it was an expression of the immediate, a gesture of solidarity, an expression of Amos' spirituality that was spontaneous rather than calculated. It is also perhaps significant that it was from the younger child to the older (Amos was two, Nathan was three) overturning perceived orders of care, from the older towards the younger. In these children, there was not some rigid, almost hierarchical, order of development of

spirituality: it was expressed in a mutual way, irrespective of supposed spiritual development concurrent with age.

Also of interest is the capacity of the child to express spirituality as their relationship with me grew. Bone notes from her own work, and its reflection of McCreery's (1996) earlier study, that,

'when McCreery engaged children in natural conversations in a place they were used to that her findings were richer. ... (children) were more forthcoming once they got to know her and when she was no longer a stranger to them. Building relationships is an important part of the research process and is also an aspect of spirituality. I realised that there would be no point referring to connection in my definition of spirituality if my research maintained a distance between myself and the participants.' (p.44)

The limitations of Bone's research at this point, discussing what she terms 'spiritual witness', lies in its deliberate selection of preschool settings where attention to aspects of spirituality is prescribed and evident. Certainly, these settings by ideological conviction focus upon moments of togetherness, of spiritually 'being with' another person, of deliberate attending to the spiritual. This was not evident in the secular setting chosen by me. Would there be signs of 'spiritual witness,' of attending to the other in relationships of care and spiritual accompaniment, in a setting where such ideas were not evident or owned by the adults in this preschool? I argue the answer is, yes, there would be such signs, but emanating primarily from the children and most immediately directed at other children. The kindness of young children is instinctive (Paley, 1999) and acts of kindness occur, but are not always witnessed or recognised. Certainly, the workers at Gateway Heath nursery provided a peaceful, secure environment, but the spiritual expression within relationship was child-originated.

5.6 Transcendence

As already noted in Chapter 4 (4.5), contrary to expectation transcendence expressed as awe and wonder did not appear as a predominant dimension in the data. However Text 13, releasing the butterflies, is the one text where transcendence was selected as the point of entry. Exposure to the beauty or strangeness of the natural world is often a source of wonder to young children as Champagne (2001) records from observations of two and a half year old Katie playing with a gull's feather she found on the beach. Champagne (2001) writes 'this world Katie and little children are entering in, is not only observed but questioned. They wonder, not always with words, but with their own special grasp, with their whole being. They are puzzled and surprised, but they also marvel at what they encounter' (p.81). The wondering of Amos (when the butterflies are released) is with his whole being – he jumps up and down – while Rachel vocalises her questioning of 'what if?' by suggesting to Cathy to shake her hand to see if the butterfly will fly away. This adult initiated activity at Gateway Heath Nursery created the opportunity to engage with the natural world, to appreciate the beauty and mystery. For the adults observing this activity, the curiosity and wonder in the children's expressions might be interpreted as just them learning about '...the unexpected by extending ... current knowledge to new situations and using information in new ways' (Duffy, 2010, p.20) or a recognition that in wondering, dimensions of the spiritual can be glimpsed.

The possible reasons for this were anticipated in Chapter 4 where I stated that the reasons are likely to be one, or a combination, of, (i) the lack of transcendence as an expression of spirituality in this age group; (ii) the rarity of expression (it is an infrequent expression not easily captured during the observation period); (iii) its interiority of expression, that means it is not easily observed even when present and

(iv) transcendence itself is a much more commonplace and everyday experience in children of this age group, who are continually living on the edge of their abilities and experience, and so 'transcend' their experience all the time.

The fact that moments of transcendence were identified as secondary expressions in multi-dimensional texts suggests that they are present and contradicts the first proposal above. It is more likely therefore that there is something rare, episodic or fleeting in transcendence as awe and wonder as an expression of spirituality in this age group. This is probably concordant with the frequency of expressions of transcendence in all other age groups, adults included. There is no obvious reason to think that it should somehow be frequent in two and three year olds. Perhaps it is the very rarity of such experience that constitutes its significance and memorability, allied to its interiority. Without verbal articulation it is much more difficult to subsequently communicate the experience to others.

If spirituality is to be looked for only in these moments of transcendence ('magic moments' in the language of Gateway Heath Nursery, although not articulated as spirituality), it is possible that the conclusion will be that these children have an absence or paucity of spiritual experience. However, if it is conceded that actually, the language of spirituality is a much more ubiquitous experience, 'heard' by '...listening to words and silence...' (Crompton, 2009, p.23), as these findings suggest and expressed mostly through relationships, creativity and meaning-making, then the vocabulary of two and three year olds' spiritual expression is transformed into one rich with expression. Occasionally within these experiences will be embedded moments of transcendence, of wonder even, that are but one dimension of spirituality.

5.7 The multi-dimensional language of spirituality

A major finding of this study exploring expressions of spirituality by two and three year olds, is that the language of spirituality, far from being dominated by elements of awe and wonder is actually more everyday, ubiquitous, and mediated predominantly through narrative imaginative exploration, situated relational connections such as spontaneous acts of kindness or occurring in solitary or collaborative reflective episodes. Fig 5.1 shows a proposed model to describe the multi-dimensional language of young children’s spirituality.

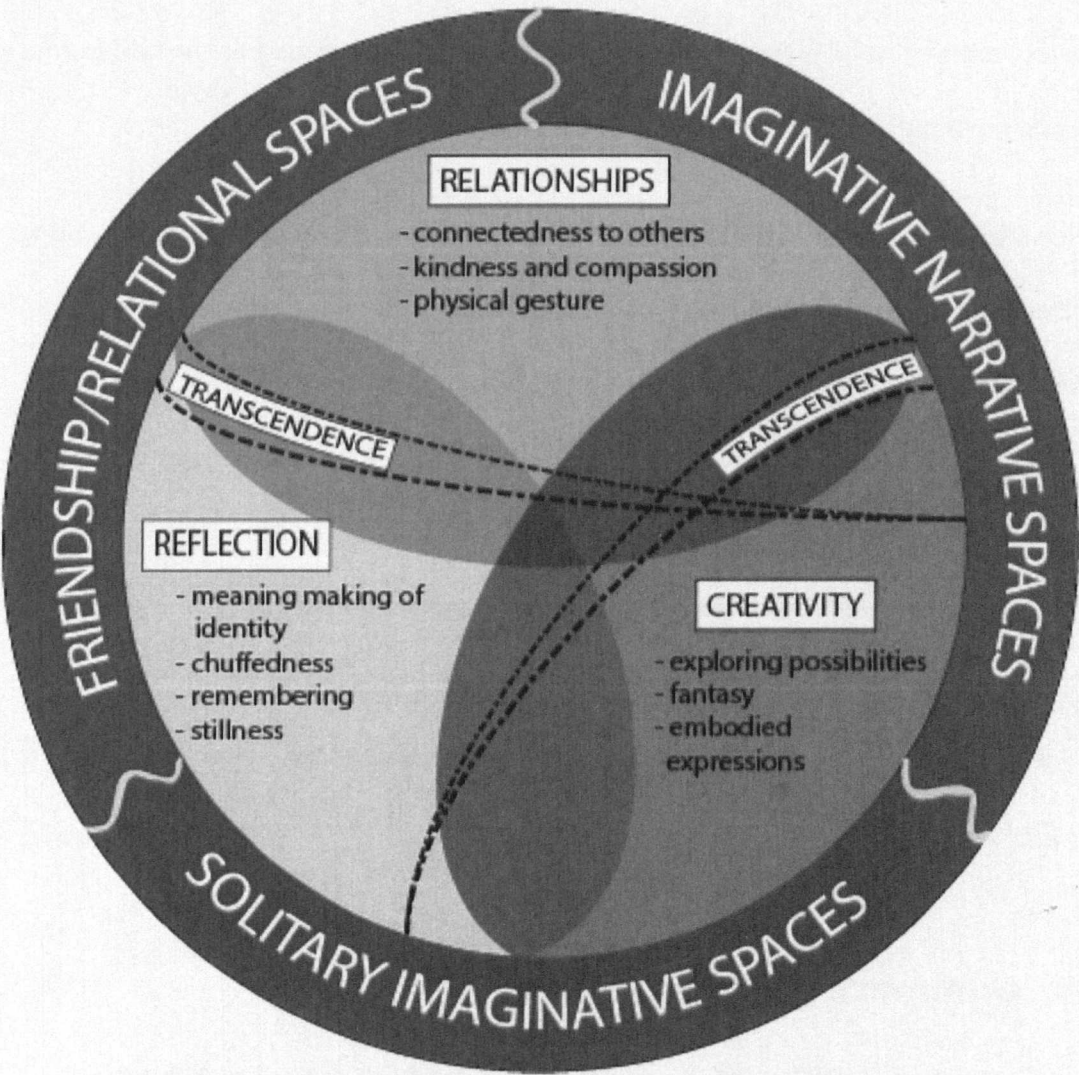


Fig. 5.1 Multidimensional language of spirituality

This figure represents the multi-dimensional nature of the two and three year olds' expressions of spirituality as evidenced through analysis of data in this study. The three segments of the outer ring of the circle, entitled: friendship/relational spaces; imaginative narrative spaces and solitary imaginative spaces, represent children's spaces, (spaces of possibility and dialogue (Moss and Petrie, 2002)) These everyday meta-environments of relationship and imagination, created and inhabited by two and three year old children and adults in the day nursery, were shown in the episodes analysed to be spaces rich with potential for listening to and hearing languages of spirituality voiced by young children. The wavy lines between each 'space' indicate how the boundaries of these environments are porous, intersecting as the children mediate meaning.

The central inner circle of the diagram contains three overlapping areas representing the three dominant, but inter-related, languages of spirituality: **relationships** (*connectedness to others, kindness and compassion, expressed through physical gesture*); **creativity** (*exploring possibilities, fantasy and embodied expression*) and **reflection** (*meaning making of identity, chuffedness and moments of remembering and stillness*). These three are shot through with two arcs of **transcendence** to represent its occasional, fleeting occurrence (*awe and wonder, mystery*) evident in my findings, although the everyday experience of transcendence, (living at the edge/pushing at the boundaries of experience) is commonplace.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter I have taken the data analysed in Chapter 4, texts drawn from participant observation in the nursery of children aged two and three years and reviewed for initial interpretation in the light of the literature of spirituality, creativity

and early childhood education as well as socio-cultural theory. I have demonstrated where there is coherence between the children's observed behaviour and the broader discourses within this literature. In other words what I observed in imaginative play as creativity, connectedness to others and meaning making, practitioners or researchers familiar with the literature would readily understand. In the following chapter I will argue that these observed behaviours create spaces where spirituality is expressed. Indeed I have already begun to do so in this chapter by proposing a new model that revises existing understandings, arguing for the ubiquity of spirituality in everyday life and the multi-dimensional language of spirituality expressed by two and three year olds.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Listening to young children requires of adults some revaluing and relearning of other languages, which takes time and effort and presupposes a willingness to be multilingual. It is, in short, difficult for those who by adulthood have lost many of the hundred languages of childhood. (*Moss et al., 2005, p.5*)

6.1 Introduction

A key focus of this doctoral research was to attend to the language(s) of spirituality of young children. Education policy in England has historically included reference to children's spiritual development. In early childhood education, the focus of this study, whilst the *EYFS* (DCSF, 2008) and the previous *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000) acknowledged the reality of a child's spirituality and guidance to attend to promoting spiritual development, it omitted the support of a rich discourse to make explicit what policymakers intended. A review of the literature (Chapter 2) confirmed a gap in knowledge related to spirituality and its expression by children aged two and three years in the UK that this study aimed to address through the main research question: *How do two and three year old children express spirituality?* Reflecting the underpinning socio-cultural framing of this study and the hope that the findings would be helpful to practitioners, a subsequent question was also articulated: *How might a socio-cultural perspective illuminate how the spirituality of young children can be recognised and supported by practitioners?*

This study therefore aimed to contribute to understanding of young children's lives in care and education settings and particularly their spirituality, and in part sought to deepen the spiritual education discourse in order to support practitioners to more

effectively evaluate how they might implement policy, whether this is implicit or explicit in curriculum guidance.

In this final chapter I begin in 6.2 by reviewing the choice of methodological approaches and discuss the effectiveness of the hermeneutic approach to the interpretation of the observed behaviours of the children in this research. This is followed (6.3) by a summary of the discussion of the main findings from this study related to young children's spiritual languages, including a proposed reference model to support practitioners in recognising dimensions of the spiritual in the everyday contexts of early childhood settings. Section 6.5 will consider possible implications for policy and pedagogy in the current policy climate. The chapter concludes in 6.6 with recommendations for future research.

6.2 Methodology

The socio-cultural theoretical framing of this research, articulated in Chapter 2, reflects the epistemological and ontological assumptions, explained in Chapter 3, that recognise the agency, from birth, of children as active meaning makers and as creators and co-constructors of knowledge and identities (Rogoff, 2003). Adopting a socio-cultural approach and focusing on very young children required a methodology that acknowledged and affirmed their capability as co-participants in the research process (Aubrey et al., 2000), and recognised that the children themselves create and co-construct how they express their spirituality.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in this qualitative study exploring young children's spirituality a hermeneutic phenomenological - rather than grounded theory (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) - approach to data analysis was selected for analysis of the data. During a conference in August 2012, where I

reported on a section of the findings from my research (Goodliff, 2012), I was challenged to defend why I had chosen a hermeneutic methodology with socio-cultural epistemology rather than a phenomenological theoretical perspective such as van Manen's (1990) notion of lifeworld, more commonly the foundation for hermeneutic research. Phenomenology is concerned with providing a description of phenomena, the life world perspective perceived largely through the subjective reflection of the researcher. Combining a socio-cultural underpinning to hermeneutics to interpret 'texts', narrative representation of the children's actions, vocalisations etc. is, I argue, justified when exploring a phenomenon such as spirituality which has multiple meanings and multiple ways it might be expressed and interpreted. The case study using an ethnographic approach proved to be an appropriate way to capture multi-layered data of the children's everyday actions and experiences in the day nursery.

One of the key elements of researching spirituality was to find a means of recording and analysing the observed behaviours of children, and to acknowledge the presuppositions brought to this area of research. It has been noted earlier that spirituality is a contested area of humanity and human behaviour, with some perhaps unable to acknowledge 'the spiritual' in any form, and reducing all human behaviour to a purely mechanistic and psychological account. This results, I argue, in part - for teachers and practitioners - from too close a link between spirituality and religion, and a refusal to take the former, spirituality, seriously due to unease or embarrassment (Abbs, 2003) or scepticism towards the latter, religion. Indeed it may be one of the factors that influenced why in the revised non-statutory EYFS guidance material (Early Education, 2012) for practitioners, there is no longer an explicitly acknowledged spiritual dimension within children's development. In this research, a secular location was deliberately chosen, in order to preclude the misunderstanding

that 'the spiritual' would be expressed by children in religious settings only or by children from homes within a faith community. What was being observed was something ubiquitous and everyday. There were no obvious religious elements to the childcare setting (unlike, say, a church based child care setting, such as the many 'pre-school' groups hosted within church facilities) nor was there any expectation that the spiritual dimension of these two and three year olds would be expressed in religious language or behaviour. Given the requirement, therefore, that this research should be removed from religious contexts, it was all the more important that the religious affiliation of the researcher, and my values and beliefs, should be clearly foregrounded in order to be acknowledged. For those to remain unacknowledged risked imposing my values and beliefs on the research.

The hermeneutic approach, then, allows the worldview, or the horizon, of the researcher to be clearly understood, so that the presence of unacknowledged bias can be removed as far as is possible. The horizon of the children's situated behaviour, recorded in field-observation, audio and video recordings, can then be approached with a framework of understanding that is explicit. This differs from a purely grounded theory approach, where the findings supposedly emerge from the data uninterrupted by any pre-existing framework of understanding. In this hermeneutic methodology, the pre-understanding is as fully acknowledged as possible, yet remains open to scrutiny and to alteration, as the two horizons meet, and the children's behaviour and expression challenge the presuppositions the researcher brings to them.

6.3 Main findings of this research

Although much more is now understood about children's spirituality (Chapter 2), there is less known about how very young children create and express dimensions of

the spiritual. Only a few studies have focused on how younger children experience, or express spirituality (e.g. McCreery, 1996; Champagne, 2003; Bone, 2007) and of these only McCreery's (1996) study undertaken with four and five year olds in school, was located in England. There are no known studies in the UK exploring the spiritual expression or experience of children aged two and three years, the age group of participants in this study, in day care settings. The inappropriateness of interviewing young children to explore spirituality is acknowledged in each of these studies and as McCreery (1996) concluded, using adult initiated activities using pictures and stories with the four and five year olds in her study was not an effective way to explore children's spiritual understanding. The challenge for researchers listening to and for spirituality (Champagne, 2003) is to be able to recognise it (Champagne, 2001; Bone, 2007) in the everyday experience of children. The imperative, that these researchers proposed, to participate in and share in those experiences in order to listen to the spiritual voice, directly influenced the ethnographic case study I designed to explore two and three year olds' expressions of spirituality in the context of their day nursery.

Close attention to the behaviours observed in these young children revealed multiple interpretations, one of which is that an action, gesture, relationship, or interaction can mediate dimensions of spirituality. The four interrelating areas of behaviours related to meanings of spirituality, identified in Chapter 3, represented my pre-understanding. These were based on definitions of spirituality in education policy and literature articulated in previous empirical studies of children's spirituality (Chapter 2), albeit predominantly, with an older age group. Where young children's spirituality has been researched previously, the expression of spirituality is closely allied to, relationships, identity, moments of inner reflection, creativity, wonder and transcendence. Taking these categories as the frame for explaining the observed behaviour of the children allowed me to access the data and begin to analyse and interpret the complex

phenomena observed, and begin to give it some meaning. It is clear from analysis of the texts presented in Chapter 4 that not all of the four categories of behaviour were equally present. There was much that could be interpreted as dimensions of creativity and reflection associated with meaning making of identity, together with relational interactions with others either present (other children or practitioners), or 'carried in the memory' (such as immediate family members) reflecting the reciprocal influence of other social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The main findings, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed that for these young children the language of spirituality is multi-dimensional. Three spaces (meta-environments) were identified where dimensions of spirituality are mediated: friendship/relational, solitary imaginative, and imaginative narrative spaces (see Fig. 5.1 reproduced below). Within these spaces the three inter-related dominant languages of **relationship**, **creativity**, and **reflection** are situated, shot through with occasional, fleeting transcendence.

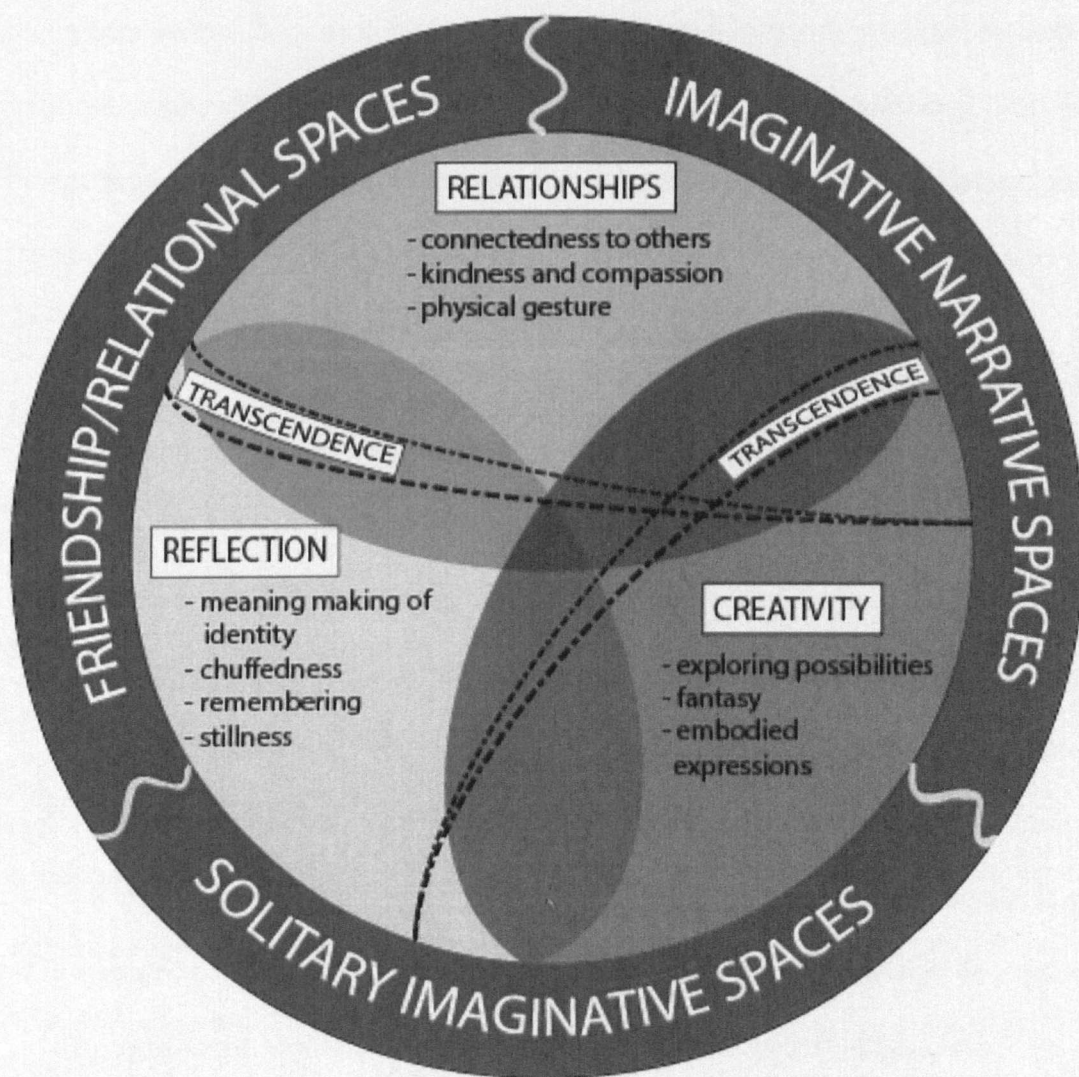


Fig. 5.1 Multidimensional language of spirituality

6.3.1 Limitations of this research

The limitations of this research include the small-scale nature of this data set and its limited context. This study focused on the lived experience of children aged 2-4 years in only one setting, a day nursery located in central England. The total number of participants, five two year olds and fifteen three year olds are not necessarily representative of all children who attend private day nurseries in England. Owing to the paucity in research studies exploring spirituality with under threes in a day care setting, a single case study was defended.

Another limitation of this small-scale research study is that the perspective of the home, from parent or carer, was not included as for children under 3 years the interactions and experiences that shape the construction of identity are situated predominantly in the home.

6.3.2 Contribution of the research

Notwithstanding the acknowledged limitations of this research, I argue this study has made a contribution to knowledge in relation to children's spirituality. It is the first in the UK to have explored spirituality with children as young as 2 and 3 year olds, attending to languages of spirituality voiced within an early childhood education and care setting (an acknowledged under-researched context (David et al., 2005)).

Spirituality is a contested phenomenon that can have multiple meanings. The findings from this study, illustrated in **Fig 5.1**, point to the multi-faceted nature of the languages of the children's spirituality that occurs in the everyday environments of the nursery. Three spaces (meta-environments) were identified where dimensions of spirituality are mediated: friendship/relational, solitary imaginative, and imaginative narrative spaces. Within these spaces the three inter-related dominant languages of the children's spirituality, **relationships**, **creativity**, and **reflection** are situated. These are voiced respectively through behaviours related to spirituality that, if recognised, are more likely to be understood by practitioners as related solely to other areas of young children's learning and being, namely: *connectedness to others, kindness and compassion, expressed through physical gesture; exploring possibilities, fantasy and embodied expression and meaning making of identity, chuffedness and moments of remembering and stillness*. From my findings **transcendence** as *awe and wonder, mystery* is an occasional, fleeting occurrence but the everyday human experience of transcendence, (pushing at the boundaries of experience) is commonplace and can be

recognised in the children's environments. I argue too, that locating this research within a secular setting (separated from a religious discourse), its findings have potential to contribute to wider debate on the priorities for early childhood in policy (see 6.5) and offer a platform for further research (6.6).

6.4 Guidelines for practitioners

As previously acknowledged the traditional understanding of spirituality as synonymous with religion, means that words such as *spiritual* or *sacred* often create embarrassment (Abbs, 2003) when introduced to discussion. An important implication of this study therefore is to offer practical ways practitioners might attend to the potential of spirituality in young children separate to any association with religion/religious belief. The following suggestions, based on findings from this study and linked to the presented model of the multi-dimensional language of spirituality (Fig. 5.1), are intended to support a broader situating of spirituality in early childhood education enabling practitioners to attend to, discuss and document children's languages.

1. Practitioners allow imaginative play to voice the child's spirituality, and to work with the perspective that young children create imaginative narrative spaces where dimensions of the spiritual may be recognised.
2. As practitioners recognise significant relationships that children develop, the various dimensions of spirituality as relationality (the connectedness to others, the building of trust, the expression of compassion, the sense of belonging, the development of personal identity through relationship, the creation of

community) may also be identified and fostered in the present day and every day life of the child.

3. Practitioners notice those moments when young children create a space of inner reflection (perhaps in a day dream or solitary, silent withdrawal from play), or the making of meaning for personal identity, and allow children space to process them, rather than intervening and perhaps snatching such moments away from the child, diminishing spirituality.

While celebrating moments of transcendence (related to awe and wonder) when recognised, practitioners need not limit expression of the spirit of the child to these occasional events.

6.5 Implications for policy and pedagogy

In the work of the Early Childhood Action (ECA) campaign group⁴, there is an emphasis on allowing children to express their uniqueness in an unhurried way (ECA, 2012) rather than viewing them as prospective successful school children (and thus potentially economically valuable). The findings of this research suggest that 2 and 3 year olds should be viewed as spiritually competent, able to express languages that include spirituality already. I argue that these young children are not persons who at a later date will become spiritual, or who will develop languages of spirituality when older but are already competent to express spirituality through the languages identified in this research. If the emphasis is always on preparation for the next (more 'valuable') stage of life the importance of what is expressed in the now will be replaced by an anxiety for 'what is not yet'. There is considerable synergy between

⁴ a non-political alliance of early years individual and organisations formed in early 2012 to campaign to influence the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012)

the recognition of the languages of spirituality in two and three year olds and the principles underpinning the ECA alternative framework that call for an unhurried early childhood (Moyles, 2012, p.5). Both emphasise the uniqueness of each child and the role of 'free imaginative play... at the centre of young children's experience and learning' (ECA, 2012 p.10). Arguably, such an 'unhurried' approach creates more space for the 'hundred languages' (Rinaldi, 2005, p.17; Moss et al., 2005, p.5) of childhood to flourish, and where, as previously asserted, there is potential for children's spirituality to be voiced.

As discussed in Chapter 1 it was the original EYFS (DCSF, 2008) framework that informed the design of this study and documentation used in dialogue with practitioners during data collection. Although the four guiding principles, the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development, have been retained in the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012, p.3), the non-statutory guidance material to practitioners (Early Education, 2012) no longer explicitly acknowledges a spiritual dimension within children's holistic development. Indeed it might be argued that where in the earlier EYFS (DCSF, 2008) policy makers emphasised the importance of positive health and *wellbeing* (my emphasis) for later economic contribution, in the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012) the policy discourse focuses on 'school readiness', standards and fulfilling 'potential' (ibid, p.2). There is now no reference to children's wellbeing. So, the latest EYFS statutory framework (DfE, 2012) lacks explicit reference to a spiritual dimension in the prime area of personal, social and emotional development, where it was previously located, nor is the spirit acknowledged in the three characteristics of effective learning or specific areas of learning such as 'Expressive Arts and Design'. The findings of this small-scale study suggest further research in to the wider implications of this gap in early childhood policy is urgently required. I argue there is a need for a broader attentiveness to

children's spirituality in education (Priestley, 1996; Watson, 2008) that acknowledges its importance in expression of their thinking, creating and imagining central to meaning making and negotiating identity. The absence of wellbeing in itself might demonstrate a further step towards a thoroughgoing secular and materialistic worldview that marginalizes both spirituality and religion (Bruce, 2002) and fosters in education a market-driven creativity, largely devoid of the humanising focus of empathy, collaboration (Chappell, 2008) and wisdom (Craft, 2008); a focus that promotes the greater good of communities rather than an individualistic pursuit of personal goals.

There is potential for findings from this research to contribute to the recently launched emergent ECA Early Years Framework (EYF) which identifies a key overarching conceptual recognition of the 'worlds children are inhabiting and to which they are contributing' (ECA, 2012, p.12). The removal of explicit reference to a spiritual dimension to young children's development from the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012), if only acknowledging that the spirit is involved in personal, social and emotional wellbeing, seems a serious error of judgement on the part of English policy makers, and one that might be easily rectified and then promoted to practitioners. The recognition of a spiritual dimension to wellbeing and, I argue, creativity - as acknowledged in the Welsh EY framework (DCELLS, 2008) - would add greatly to the nurturing of the full humanity of young children, allowing them to create and participate in spaces where languages of spirituality, alongside other languages might be recognised.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Research

Having begun to identify the multi-dimensional language of spirituality expressed by two and three year olds in a day nursery, further research in professional day-care contexts (e.g. childminders or pre-school) could deepen this understanding by extending the contexts researched. The secular character of the setting in this study, while important for this initial piece of research, given the necessity to distinguish spirituality from religion, may yield results with significant differences to a day-care setting with specific religious affiliation. It is presumed that this is unlikely, but without research this is a presumption only. Similarly, research in settings other than professional day care, such as the home, or play outside of a professional setting might yield different findings.

A research project over a longer timeframe would allow much more observation to be made, and given the infrequent nature of moments of transcendence as awe and wonder, it is possible that more would be captured by the researcher(s), and greater richness to the data created. The findings from this research reveal that creativity within imaginative narrative play is the most widely observed context for the multi-faceted mosaic of behaviours that have been interpreted as mediating expression of spirituality in this age group. Followed by moments of connection in relationships and meaning making in reflection (e.g. chuffedness), these three are the predominant languages for expression of spirituality in two and three year olds. Analysing play within a home context might yield different relational connections, not least given, in all probability, the far fewer other children present. Here the balance between creativity and relationality might be weighted differently in a context where close, supportive relationships are the norm in many family contexts. Research focusing just on two year olds (or children just approaching their second birthday) may distinguish

whether some dimensions of the language of spirituality are exclusive only to this age group and/or younger children. For example do the narratives created by younger children express more frequent episodes of embodied expressions of meaning making.

Questions might be asked what happens in a child's spiritual expression where loss, tragedy or abuse is featured? An element of adult spirituality, and even of older children, is lament, the coming to terms with grief and disappointment. Could this be present in two and three year olds?

Given all the ways in which spirituality and religion have been separated in this research, locating the context in a secular rather than religious setting, and seeking spirituality in the 'everyday', it may be that in rare cases, there is a religious experience that sheds light upon a young child's spiritual experience and expression: a sense of the numinous that is clearly linked to a religious experience within church, mosque or synagogue setting. It would prove very difficult to capture such a phenomenon in the everyday, but for that reason alone, it should not be entirely ruled out, unless it were asserted that religious experience is an entirely human and material construct.

6.7 Conclusion

I set out to ask the question *how do two and three year olds express spirituality?*

Deriving categories of expression from work with older children, I extrapolated backwards and asked if such categories as creativity or transcendence might also be present in two and three year olds, and if they were, could this be how spiritual expression is mediated? Is imaginative play a language of spirituality for this age group in the same way that speech, conversation and metaphor are the modes of expressions amongst older children? I believe that it is, and building the argument on

these premises, I claim that it is possible to discern expressions of spirituality in toddlers: in fact it looks remarkably similar in 'fabric' and in its mosaic of expressions as in older age groups, even if the 'language' and 'voice' used is different. Children of this age group in a daycare context make sense of the world and their personal identity through imaginative play and everyday creativity, they are held in supportive relationships of trust and care, and are capable of moments of compassionate care for others, that may be unrecognised or unseen.

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APPENDICES

Key to Appendices

1. EYFS - a Unique Child DCSF 2008
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Appendix 1: EYFS - a Unique Child DCSF 2008

The EYFS framework (DfES, 2007) – reference to spiritual dimension

The underpinning guiding principles of the EYFS (DfES, 2007a) ‘...are grouped ‘into four distinct but complementary themes’ (DfES, 2007a, p.8) of:

- A unique child
- Positive relationships
- Enabling environments
- Learning and development

These themes underpin and contextualize the practice requirements of the EYFS and describe how practitioners should support young children’s care, learning and development. Each of the themes is further broken down ‘into four commitments describing how the principles can be put into practice’ (ibid, p.9). Provided to practitioners as a set of materials entitled *EYFS Principles into Practice* cards (DfES, 2007b), these explain how practitioners can implement the principles in their every day practice.

Two of the four commitments for the first Principle, ‘A Unique Child’: 1.1 Child Development and 1.4 Health and Well-being, acknowledge a spiritual dimension to children’s uniqueness. Practitioners read that:

‘Babies and children develop in individual ways and at varying rates.

Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual,

social and emotional, is equally important.’ (DfES, 2007b, Commitment 1.1 (emphasis in original))

‘Children’s health is an integral part of their emotional, mental,

social, environmental and spiritual well-being and is supported

by attention to these aspects. (DfES, 2007b, Commitment 1.4 (emphasis in original))

Appendix 2: Pre-doctoral research study

The backdrop of the lack of discussion and debate about spiritual aspects of young children's development, and my own continuing interest, led to the earlier small-scale study (Goodliff, 2006) to explore how spirituality is conceptualised by adults working with children under five in day nurseries and pre-school playgroups. These settings are situated within the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector of early years care and education provision in England.

The rationale for situating the initial study within the PVI, rather than maintained (funded by the local education authority), sector of pre-school provision stemmed from a review of the literature that revealed that whilst some exploration of early years teachers' perceptions and understandings of young children's spiritual development/spirituality had been undertaken (Eaude, 2003, 2005), no previous study had sought to capture the views of practitioners working with under fives in settings combining education and care, sometimes termed 'educare' (Smith, 1988) or 'educative care... all extra-familial contexts where children are offered nurture and learning...' (Cupit, 2004). Yet, the practitioners working in these settings are required to implement the same curriculum guidance as teachers in maintained nursery provision. The decision was also influenced by my long-term professional role as a trainer/tutor of early years practitioners working in the PVI sector.

The terms 'spirituality' and 'spiritual development' were both included in the study as they are used interchangeably in policy documents. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, examination of their definitions and meanings revealed understandings of both terms to be problematic.

In my pre-doctoral study, then, the research question, addressed to early years practitioners, was 'what is your understanding of young children's spirituality/spiritual development?' A phenomenological approach within the interpretive paradigm was adopted reflecting my view that knowledge is situated (Cohen et al., 2007) and that coming to know will therefore involve revealing such situated perspectives. Following the BERA ethical code, (BERA, 2004) ethical approval was granted by the university's ethics committee in February, 2004 and data were collected from a purposive sample of 30 practitioners from nine different settings using anonymous questionnaires which generated a sample for ten semi-structured individual interviews (seven undertaken face to face and three by telephone). Acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic, practitioners were invited by one of their own colleagues (known to me or a colleague in another institution) to participate in the study and complete a questionnaire. Interested participants could then indicate if they wished to be followed up for an interview. The questionnaire (Appendix) presented the practitioners with seventeen statements/definitions relating to spirituality/spiritual development. The majority of these statements were selected because they featured in Dowling's (2005) additional chapter on 'Young Children's Spirituality' included in the 2nd edition. An article, written by Dowling, (7.7.05) based on the contents of the chapter, had also been published in *Nursery World*, the weekly journal specifically targeting early years practitioners, highlighting: 'Connection; independence; a sense of wonder, awe and mystery; search for meaning and purpose; Creativity and Feelings' (Dowling, 2005 pp 20-23) as contributing to children's spiritual development. Other statements were included because they consistently featured in the literature relating to interpreting spiritual development/spirituality at that time (Best, 1996, Hay and Nye, 1998, Thatcher, 2000).

As a way of further documenting the meaning attributed to these concepts, practitioners were also invited to contribute up to three other, personal 'understandings' of the term in

their own words and to indicate which (if any) of the seventeen statements most closely represented their understanding of the meaning of children's spiritual development or spirituality.

Thirty completed questionnaires were received from nine settings. Practitioners from three of the settings surveyed – two private day nurseries and one pre-school playgroup – expressed interest in participating in follow-up interviews. I undertook seven face to face interviews and three by telephone. The ten interviews, which lasted between ten and twenty minutes, were recorded, transcribed and then analysed thematically. These follow-up interviews were loosely structured around three questions:

- What were your thoughts/thinking when you first saw the questionnaire about spiritual development?
- How would you explain your own understanding of children's spirituality/spiritual development?
- Are you aware of any guidance in the curriculum documents about children's spiritual development?

Quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data exposed strong agreement (27 out of 30) amongst the practitioners that spirituality/spiritual development is *not* 'only for those children growing up in families with a religious belief'. However when this view was probed further in interviews, a more confused position emerged suggesting that for most of these practitioners, spirituality was indeed linked to religion or religious belief. A position compounded, it appeared, by wording in the curriculum guidance (QCA, 2000), set out earlier in section 1.2, requiring practitioners to plan activities that promote spiritual development, and a lack of clear articulation by

OFSTED inspectors of how they judge whether children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is being fostered appropriately (OFSTED, 1998).

From the questionnaires, an implicit connection held by practitioners between spirituality and young children's emotional development was revealed. This was further reinforced in the interviews when practitioners referred explicitly to their relationships with the children, relationships with each other, and the day-to-day practice in their setting. In conversation the majority of the practitioners mostly related an understanding of children's spirituality/wellbeing with feelings of warmth, happiness and the need for young children to enjoy themselves. The use of two research instruments – the questionnaire and the interview – highlighted difficulties of translation of principles into practice. For example, in the questionnaire, other definitions of spirituality – 'awe and wonder', 'creativity' and 'moral development' were seen by practitioners as strongly associated with their understandings of spirituality, yet, when questioned, few of the interviewees were able to suggest how these might be evidenced in children's lives and/or experiences in the setting.

Questionnaire for Early years practitioners:

Perspectives on children's spiritual development or spirituality

The aim of this confidential questionnaire is to explore:

what practitioners understand by the term: 'spiritual development' or 'spirituality' and how it can be fostered or nurtured in young children

1. Early years setting

Please indicate the type of setting you work in:

(e.g. day nursery/pre-school playgroup etc)

.....

2. Qualifications

a) Please state the full title of your early years qualification: (e.g. CACHE Diploma in Childcare and Education)

.....

b) If you have undertaken, or are currently undertaking, an advanced or higher qualification (e.g. Higher National Certificate, Foundation Degree), please write the title of your award here:

.....

3. Children's spiritual development

What do you understand children's spiritual development/spirituality to be?

Please tick the box next to each of the statements below where:

Yes = that's my understanding No = I don't agree ? = I don't know

I understand spiritual development/spirituality to be:

A specific area of all children's development

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

The same as moral development

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

The same as personal, social and emotional development

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Part of moral development

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Developing a child's spirit or soul

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Only for those children growing up in families with a religious belief

Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

A sense of mystery Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

When a child develops a religious belief Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

A sense of awe and wonder Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Belief in a deity (i.e. God) Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

An open-ness to nature Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Creativity or creative activities Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

A search for meaning and purpose to life Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Feelings of transcendence (an awareness beyond oneself) Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Caring and looking out for each other Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Love and friendship Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

Being still and quiet Yes ☐ No ☐ ? ☐

If there are any other ways that you would express your understanding of children's spiritual development, please write them here:

a).....

b).....

c).....

4. Which ONE of the above statements to which you have ticked the box 'Yes' is closest to your understanding of the meaning of children's spiritual development.

.....

5. Fostering spiritual development

In order of importance (1 = most important) rank the following statements which describe how you think young children's spiritual development might be fostered or nurtured by early years practitioners?

i.e. The statement which you believe is most important you number '1'; the statement second most important allocate '2', and so on, excluding any statements with which you disagree.

NB There is no upper or lower limit to the number of statements to which you can allocate a number.

Providing an environment which fosters children's curiosity ☐

Practitioners acknowledge children's experiences and allow them to express wonder and joy and also fear, sorrow or pain ☐

Children's attention is drawn to the detail of the world around them, and the wonder of creation ☐

Children know they are loved and accepted - opportunities are provided for each child to develop a sense of belonging ☐

Children are offered quiet places to reflect and time to 'be' ☐

Providing an environment where there is a commitment to developing an ethos of respect for self and respect for others ☐

Children encounter and experience moral values, a sense of right and wrong; practitioners model and communicate how to care for and respect others ☐

Children's questions are welcomed and valued – they are ☐
given time and space and encouragement to share thoughts etc.

Children are encouraged to be creative individuals – they are ☐
provided with many opportunities to experiment

Children are encouraged to use their imagination and are offered ☐
a rich variety of ways to express this

Children are offered opportunities to express gratitude to God ☐
for his world, for the joy of being alive and provision of basic needs

Practitioners observe and recognise children's feelings of transcendence – ☐
a sense of reality beyond the immediate

Children have opportunities to celebrate and share their capabilities and ☐
achievements

Children receive praise and encouragement to develop their self-esteem ☐
and self worth

6. If this questionnaire has been of particular interest to you and you would like to be part of a
follow up group interview please tick this box ☐

You have now completed this Questionnaire. Please pass it to the person in your setting who
is collecting them in.

Thank you very much for your help.

Appendix 3: OUHPMEC ethical approval

From John Oates Chair, The Open University Human Participants and Materials Research Ethics Committee Research School

Email j.m.oates@open.ac.uk

Extension 52395

To Gill Goodliff (FELS) EdD student

Subject Young children's expressions of spirituality

Ref HPMEC/2009/#570/1

Date 27 April 2009

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 1st April 2009, is approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee, subject to satisfactory responses to the following:

You are asked to:

1. 1. If staff are likely to be filmed, photographed or otherwise recorded while interacting with the children, seek their agreement using a consent form;
2. 2. explain to staff how you will seek consent/assent from the child participants, how you will anonymise data and what the data will be used for;
3. 3. add a condition to the information sheet that, up to a specified date, for example the date of data aggregation, data derived from an individual child will be destroyed if this requested by child or parent;
4. 4. Amend the following sentence in the information sheet 'All the data collected will be considered confidential and the identity of all children will be anonymised (in other words it will not be possible for your child to be identified by others in the data)' substituting 'anonymised' for 'considered confidential' and vice versa.
5. 5. Correct the inconsistency between the 'no-risks' statement in the letter to parents and the acknowledgement in the proforma of two risks. You could say, for example, that steps have been taken to minimise risk;
6. 6. Include your contact details in the information sheet and give an additional contact in case a participant or parent wants to talk to someone else about your research. This contact could be your primary supervisor, for example.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates

Appendix 4: Information for staff of Gateway Heath Nursery on my research

My research interest is the spiritual dimension of young children's lives. The fostering of children's spirituality or spiritual development is embedded in legislation.

For example the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) contains explicit reference to a spiritual dimension to young children's lives. Two of the four commitments for the first underpinning Principle, 'A Unique Child': 1.1 Child Development and 1.4 Health and Well-being, acknowledge a spiritual dimension to children's uniqueness. We read that:

'Babies and children develop in **individual ways** and at **varying rates**.

Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional, **is equally important.**' (DCSF, 2008, Commitment 1.1)

'Children's **health** is an integral part of their **emotional, mental, social, environmental and spiritual well-being** and is supported by attention to these aspects. (DCSF, 2008, Commitment 1.4)

This implies that the spiritual dimension of children's lives is very important and if not promoted or fostered, the child loses a vital aspect of their well-being. However it is a concept that is not easy to define, nor provide explanation. Spirituality is also, for many people, a sensitive or controversial topic because it is associated with religion and/or religious belief.

Research questions

So in my research I am interested in 'listening' to how young children express their spirituality. My research question is 'How do two and three year old children express their spirituality?'

I take a socio-cultural view of the child – seeing them as active participants in their own learning. Young children have so much to show/tell us about the ways in which they experience their lives and the world in which they live. In my research therefore I am seeking to enter the two and three year old children's everyday world in the nursery to uncover meanings about their spirituality and to explore ways to document this aspect of their lives.

I plan to gather my data collaboratively with children using a variety of methods. At the moment I think these will include participant and non participant observations of the children playing alone and together and audio recordings of their conversations and spontaneous expressions. I would also hope to work with the children using cameras, stories/role play using small play figures/props and drawing and painting.

Ethical research with children

I will be seeking consent from all parents of two and three year old children in the nursery to participate in the research. In recognition of the children's rights to express their views on all matters that affect them, I will also be seeking each child's consent to participate in any activity or conversation I am documenting or recording. I wish to be sensitive to each individual child's ongoing consent and responsive to behaviours (each time I visit) that might indicate they do not wish to participate. Communication and consultation with the children's key workers will be crucial in this regard also so that if at any time they felt my

presence is having an adverse effect on any child, they should let me know immediately. This will be something to discuss when we meet together before I commence the research.

Gill Goodliff – March 2009

Appendix 5: Letter to parents of Gateway Heath Nursery

April 2009

Dear Parents

I am writing to ask your permission for your child to participate in my doctoral research study. Young children have so much to show/tell us about the ways in which they experience their lives and the world in which they live. I am interested in discovering how through their relationships and the activities and experiences they engage with everyday at the nursery, young children express spirituality. Amongst the many aspects of children's development that the government recognises as important, perhaps the least understood is children's spiritual development and wellbeing.

In my research I am concerned to recognise this dimension of children's lives – for instance through their curiosity and wonder at the world, growth in trust and concern for others and creative expressions such as music or painting. Spirituality is often confused with religion or a religious belief, but this is not the focus of my research.

To explore young children's spirituality I shall be observing their play both by themselves and with others; digitally recording their conversations, spontaneous singing and, alongside their key worker, offering different activities to capture different ways in which spirituality might be recognised. The children regularly use digital cameras in the nursery and this is another tool I will offer to capture children's interests and to discuss these with me. The nursery's photographic image policy will be followed. Additionally a copy of any picture to be used in the research will be shared with all parents in consultation with the nursery manager and the right of any child or parent to refuse permission at any time for the use of an image of their child will be fully respected. Attached to this letter is a separate photographic consent form for the use of photos in my research.

All the data collected will be anonymised and the identity of all children will be considered confidential (in other words it will not be possible for your child to be identified by others in the data). Only children in the nursery who have parental permission, and who themselves agree to participate, will be involved in the study. Also, children or parents may withdraw their permission at any time during the study without penalty by indicating this decision to me or the key worker. During the period of data collection, (the end of April to mid September) any parent can request that data on their child be destroyed. All data collected will be destroyed in 2016, being six years after the completion and submission of the research project.

I would like to assure you that my study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Committee at the Open University. In addition, it has the support of the staff at Pathways Nursery - the nursery manager has seen my CRB enhanced clearance. The nursery staff are also aware that all steps have been taken to minimise any risks to children from participation in this study.

There has been very little research undertaken with young children to understand their spirituality and this research will be of benefit to your children and others in the

future. If you are happy for your child to participate in this research study, please complete the attached consent form.

If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like any additional information, please speak to one of the nursery staff or direct to me. I have listed my contact details at the bottom of this letter together with those of my research supervisor.

Thank you very much

Yours sincerely,

Gill Goodliff

Faculty of Education and Language Studies

The Open University

Stuart Hall Building

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

Tel: 01908 659370

Email: g.d.goodliff@open.ac.uk

Professor Anna Craft
University of Exeter School of Education and Lifelong Learning
St Lukes Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter
EX1 2LU
Devon

A.R.Craft@open.ac.uk or A.R.Craft@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Consent Form for participants in Research Study

To be completed after reading the letter to parents

Title of Study: Young children's expressions of spirituality

Researcher: Gill Goodliff

I/We have read the letter to parents.

I/we understand that all names/personal details will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

The research study has been explained to me/us and I/we, as the parent(s) of

.....

agree to them participating in the study.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 7: Photographic/digital image Consent Form for participants in Research Study

To be completed after reading the letter to parents.

Title of Study: Young children’s expressions of spirituality

Researcher: Gill Goodliff

I/We have read the letter to parents.

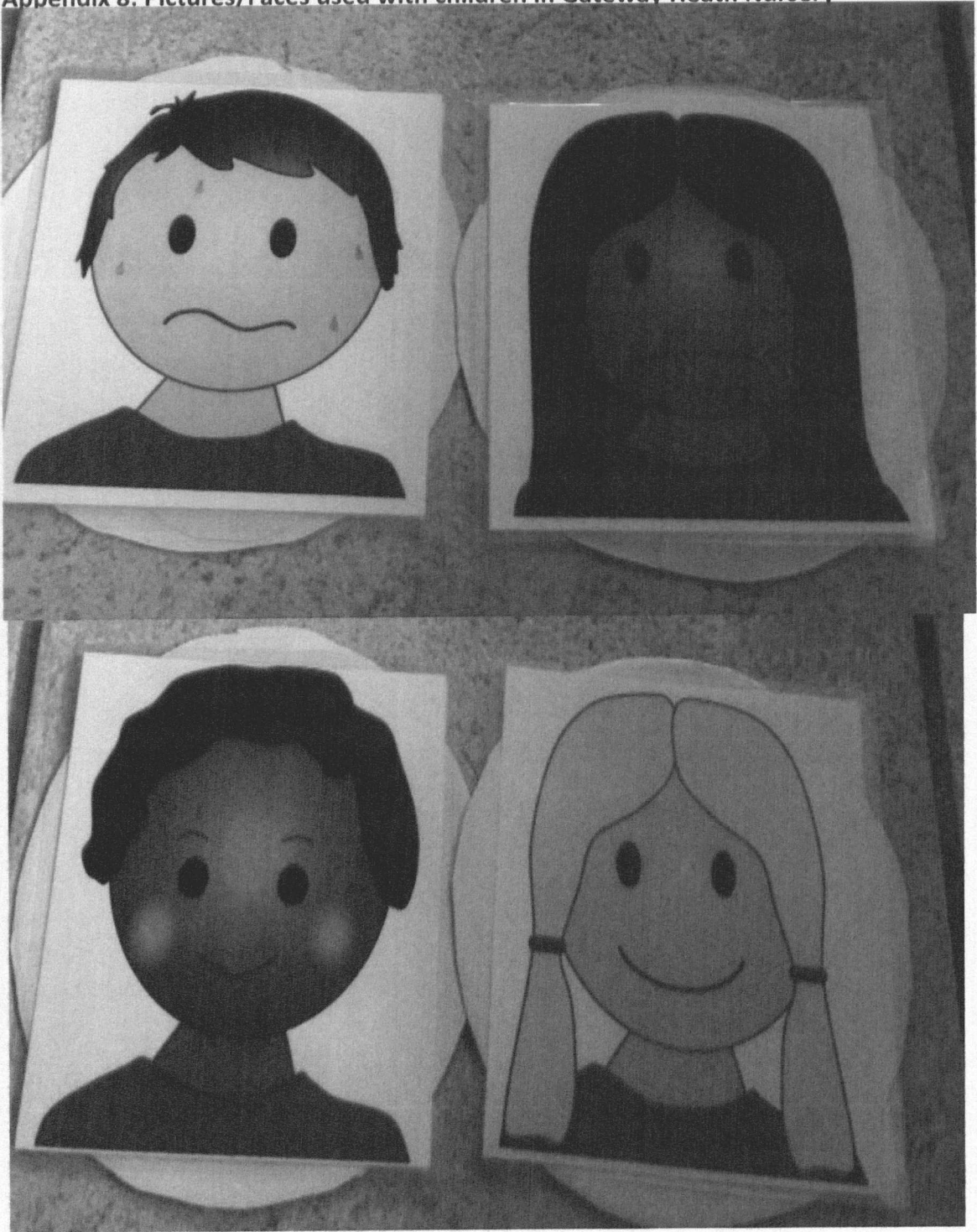
The potential use of photograph/digital image in the research study has been explained to me/us and I/we, as the parent(s) of

.....

agree to photos/digital images that we have seen, and have a copy of, being used in the study.

Signed:

Date:



Appendix 9: Consent form for staff

To be completed after reading the Information Sheet

Title of Study: Young Children's expressions of spirituality

Researcher: Gill Goodliff

Ihave read the Information Sheet for Staff

If you are willing to take part in this research project please place a 'X' in the box below, complete the details below and return the signed form.

☐ I am willing to take part in this research project in the way explained in the Information Sheet for Staff and give my permission for any information (data) collected to be used in an anonymous form in any written reports, presentations and published papers relating to this study. My written consent will be sought separately before any identifiable data are used in such dissemination.

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the research project and to request the destruction of any information that I have shared with you up to the point at which the information is used in analysis.

Signing this form indicates that I understand the purpose of the research, as explained in the Information Sheet. **I understand that all names/personal details will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.**

(If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to speak to me or contact me by email at: g.d.goodliff@open.ac.uk or by telephone on 01908 659370).

Name: (Please print).....

Signed:..... **Date:**.....

Please return your completed form direct to Gill Goodliff or return it in the attached envelope to the Nursery Manager.

Appendix 10: Thinking about Spirituality with staff at Gateway Heath nursery

Spirituality is difficult to define....

I like this quote by a Jewish Rabbi who wrote:

– *'spirituality is like a bird if you hold it too tightly it chokes, if you hold it too loosely it flies away. Fundamental to spirituality is the absence of force'* Rabbi Hugo Gryn (1992) p.4

Different commentators have variously described spirituality as:

A felt sense, (e.g. a good feeling of being loved or valued)

It is non-verbal (e.g. difficult or impossible to put into words);

To do with 'knowing' and 'being'

It affects everything

Awe and wonder

Delight

Search for meaning

What do you think?

What aspects of a child being unique might be said to be spiritual?

Are there times when you watch the children or share in activities with them that you might say are 'spiritual moments'?

Appendix 11: Pilot Study

The aim of my pilot study (undertaken in January 2008) was to test out different data gathering tools selected from the multi-layered Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001).

The study was undertaken in a childminding setting. The childminder⁵, Anneka, a qualified and experienced day care practitioner, had two daughters, Dawn and Ella, aged 3 years and 2 years, and was the childminder of my friend's daughter, Janie, also aged 3 years. Janie has Down Syndrome. Anneka cares for Janie for two days each week. At the end of January 2008, Janie's baby brother, Paul, was to join her at Anneka's when their mother returned to work following maternity leave.

Owing to the constraints of my workload demands and the childminder's request that I complete my study before Janie's brother started in the setting at the end of January, the period of data collection was a very short, only three visits of four hours preceded by two visits to build relationships with participants. I had hoped by visiting twice weekly over a two week period but circumstances made this impossible. The weather was wet and cold on every day I attended resulting in no opportunities to explore outdoors. The structured timetable to each session did not facilitate my intention to use stories/role play to enter into the children's play. I found the time went very quickly every day.

Ethical parameters

Consent forms were drawn up for the childminder/parents to be signed after the information sheet had been read and all details of the pilot study explained. The letters accompanying the consent forms included the following paragraph dealing with the important ethical issue of the children's ongoing consent and sensitivity to potential power imbalance in activities (Oates, 2005): This was also used in the doctoral research.

⁵ all names changed for confidentiality

For our first meeting at Anneka's home I had prepared an information sheet to explain more about my research study, the specific aims and parameters of the pilot study. I was introduced to her daughters, Dawn and Ella, who played an imaginative game whilst we chatted. I had invited Anneka to raise any questions she had. I shared with her the Mosaic approach to listening to children and how this had been used in research studies. We discussed how I intended to try out some of the methods in this approach in order to evaluate their potential for generating data that documented the children's views, thoughts, feelings about themselves and their lives that might reveal what is spiritual. On the information sheet I set out the different data collection tools and offered the following possible ways I would use them:

- Observations of the children playing alone and together
- Recorded child conversations (talking to them about who they are, their likes and dislikes, special people, what they enjoy doing (favourite activities or places))
- Children using cameras
- Listening to the children through opportunities for them to take me to see special people or places indoors and outdoors and to 'tell' me about them
- Stories/role play using small play figures/props
- Recorded conversations with parent/carer

Data collection

A provisional time-frame was agreed for the pilot study that included an informal visit. It was anticipated that data would be gathered over three, 4 hour morning visits in the second half of January. The mornings were chosen as Anneka's older daughter, Dawn, attends nursery in the afternoons. Aware of time constraints in ethnographic studies (Wolcott, 1995) generally and particularly for this pilot study, an additional two potential dates for gathering data were identified if found to be necessary. My final visit to the setting was 4th February 2008. During

my first visit on 7th January I did not take any material for data collection with me. On this occasion only the childminder and her daughters were present as it was not a day when Janie attended. I have known Janie and her parents since she was a year old so although I acknowledged Janie would be surprised to see me at Anneka's, I would not be completely unknown to her.

In order to test out the data collection tools and evaluate their potential for generating data that documented the children's expressions of spirituality, I wanted to 'enter' into the children's worlds. It was necessary, and important, to spend time familiarizing myself with the setting and the children and they with me. Establishing relationships of trust with the children took time; Dawn, the eldest girl, aged almost 4 years was soon chatting with me and was ready to ask questions about my presence in her home. Anneka had expected her to be more confident as a result of her attendance, for over a term, at a nursery class attached to the local primary school each afternoon. Her sister, Ella, aged 2 stayed close to her mother but watched me carefully. I turn now to discuss each of the selected tools I tried out in my pilot study and comment, following analysis and reflection, on the quality of the data and what, if anything, it revealed in relation to my research question.

Observations: Observations are one of the two traditional tools that make up the 'methodological pieces of the Mosaic approach' (Clark, 2006). I carried out narrative participant observations, lasting approximately ten minutes, of each of the girls over the first two visits (17th January and 21st January). I recorded what was happening and, as far as I was able, what was said by the children. I had forgotten how difficult undertaking narrative observations are, particularly as a participant in the setting.

Being able to discuss and review the data (albeit informally) from my observations with Anneka reduced the acknowledged researcher bias. I found the observations offered rich data that was useful in documenting the girls' play.. In many of my observations of Janie, for example, she is engaged in imaginative play with dolls; she spends time every session with interactive books that play music when turning the page or pressing a button; she delights in

dressing up – putting on and taking off aprons, hats etc. Janie has a limited spoken vocabulary and draws on her more extensive 'Makaton' vocabulary to sign during her play and in interactions with adults. The observations offered glimpses of the girls lived experiences but over such a short time-frame their value in revealing the 'spiritual' was limited.

Recorded interviews and conversations: I had thought that interviews with the children might not be possible and decided to focus on recording conversations with the girls. I introduced the light-weight audio recorder to the children on 21st January. This was a recent purchase. I had researched a suitable, lightweight, reasonably priced digital model that offered both ease of use and good quality recordings.

In my field notes for 21st January I noted that Dawn was very keen to hear her voice and I allowed time to explain and demonstrate how the recorder worked. I had practised using this recorder at home but was not fully confident in operating it the first time I recorded the children. For example when Dawn asked to hear her voice I had initial difficulty in locating the 'play back' facility. I asked Dawn if I could record us talking together about important people and things. This was not a structured interview. Dawn chatted and sang for about ten minutes. I later recorded the hour long conversations that took place between the girls and Anneka during the adult initiated playdough activity.

The transcription of Dawn's conversation revealed how she saw herself in relation to others; each of the immediate members of her family was named; her favourite friend at nursery is Molly. She showed and told me what toys she likes, foods she enjoys and places she visits.

As I read through the transcription of this first recording I also reflected on the number of references to media 'brands' for toys, popular eating places etc. The transcription of the playdough session also made me aware that I was an 'outsider' in their lives. I didn't know the characters in the popular pre-school TV programmes they watch and it was these characters with 'magic powers' that they wanted to model with the dough. My field notes

recorded that Janie was more interested in rolling and cutting the dough but the other girls often offered her a 'BooBaa' model they had made and which Janie received but soon squashed.

As a research tool the recorded conversations suggest it is a more powerful tool for use with older children and adults. Janie's limitations with spoken language meant that this was not a tool that empowered her in participating and Ella at two years old only contributed during the playdough activity. On reflection I think the digital recorder offers possibilities in future but I need to re-think its use with the youngest children. It may be that using the clip-on microphone facility (with the recorder in child's pocket) and combining this with participant observations would be more effective in generating data to answer the research question.

Camera I first introduced the camera to Janie on an afternoon visit on Thursday 31st January. Dawn was not present on this occasion as she was at nursery and her sister, Ella was asleep.

Janie soon understood how to operate the digital camera. She took photographs of her brother lying on the activity mat, of Anneka, of the dolls and the floor. She was very pleased with what she did, and smiled and giggled throughout. When Dawn and Ella used the camera (taking turns as only one camera) they became very cross with each other because each wanted to take a picture of their mother and baby Paul who was with Anneka for the first time. Both girls were competent users of the camera and it is certainly a tool that empowers young children to participate in meaning making.

Appendix 12: Routine of the nursery

The timetable for each morning session was:

- 8.00 – 9.00: Before school – each morning six or seven 4-7 year olds attend the nursery together with the 2-4 year olds whose parents are working. Breakfast is available at 8.00 a.m. and until 8.30 the children are free to select activities from the materials provided; at 8.30 the school children assemble on the carpet in readiness for their walk over to the school; opportunity to share about the day ahead and check everyone has bags etc. the nursery aged children continue playing at this time;
- 9.00-9.30 Nursery children arrive, take their name with photo to the board; Sandra (nursery manager) or Cathy (deputy manager) are available to talk with parents/carers on arrival; children were free to select activities from the materials provided;
- 9.30-10.00 Circle time – concludes with member of staff explaining the activities available (e.g. visit to post office; preparation of snack; water, indoor/outdoor etc); children then articulate the activity they would like to start participating in;
- 10.00-11.00: Children encouraged to start with their chosen play activity, then free to play selecting from accessible nursery resources. All children will access snack during this time;
- 11.20-11.55: Circle time (plenary session, recalling activities undertaken);Adult led group activities on carpet (i.e. musical sounds, singing, story, discussion). Youngest children often participated in differentiated activity in small room during first 15 minutes then joined other children for story/singing.
- 11.45- 12.00: Morning session children begin to leave; others toilet and hand-washing ready for lunch
- Midday Lunch
- 1.00 Afternoon session children arrive take their name with photo to the board; Sandra (nursery manager) or Cathy (deputy manager) are available to talk with parents/carers on arrival; arriving children were free to select activities from the materials provided;
- 1.30 Circle time;
- 1.45-3.00 (repeat of morning session)
- 3.00 Some nursery children collected by parents before picking up siblings from school; other children will remain in nursery until 6 p.m.
- 3.15 Member of staff collects 4-7 year olds from school and brings to nursery for after-school session.

Appendix 13: Example early analysis of data

Date/data type	Ubiquitous – fundamental to human experience: identity, death, pain, sorrow; ‘questions of ultimacy’	Transcendence (awe and wonder, mystery),	Creativity (music, imaginative play, free expression)	In relationships – family/ friends/adults and children	Chuffedness/social identity	Reflection – meaning making of individual experience	Day dreaming, stillness, quiet
Field notes/observations							
15.5.09 – first day of data collection; field note observation -	Sian (3) is crying quietly in the role play area – begins to sob; SM moves over to her – puts arm round and comforts her; warm relationship... Kieron tries new fruits at snack time – v pleased with himself			Sandra asks Carly and Lucy (both 4) sharing a book together on the sofa; ST asks if Sian can join them – they make space; Sian notably happier when Katy (3) returns from walk – seems reassured;		The room is peaceful; Amos spontaneously skips and jumps; a delight in being... exuberance Kieron tries new fruits at snack time – v pleased with himself	
27.5.09		Gemma’s face as she stands next to her older sister watching the butterflies being released by Cathy	Gemma in imaginative game alone with doll and buggy;	Arun (4) proudly announces he is wearing the cardigan given by family for his birthday.			

1.6.09	Sian comes in crying:	<p>Carly and Lucy on the carpet they sing 'oooh! Aaah!' repeating the sounds together. Deborah comes and joins them.. - spontaneous vocalisation..</p> <p>Rachel, Billy, Kirsten S, Gemma (all 3 yrs) imaginative game in role play area - 'relationships and food'</p> <p>Kirsten S. and Kirsten P. imaginative game in role play area with spontaneous singing</p> <p>Lovely</p> <p>La, la, la, la, la - la, la, la, la, la, la, la</p> <p>There's an egg here, la, la, nice cup of tea</p> <p>Ishy, wishy, ishy, wishy wa, ishy, wish wa, ishy, wishy wa</p> <p><i>c/f recording transcript...</i></p> <p>In circle time we listen to Faure's Sicilian dance while closing eyes or watching lit</p>	<p>C.L. & D. 'are you busy with your mother?' 'can I have one chip please - one chip gone now</p> <p>Candles and music remind of home experiences - parents meals/barbecues; church; c/f recording transcript</p> <p>Nathan, Joe and Ryan sit on sofa and share books; 'I'm a crab pinch'; 'I'm a woodpecker pinch;'</p>		
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Appendix 14: Observation transcript (4.2.2)

Audio files	Field observation notes	InitialCode
16-06-09 a 25 minute recording: Kirsten S. and Charlotte are playing with the castle; Billy is with the cars and is joined for a while by Amos; Esther (new child 2 yrs) is threading beads/button;	On the carpet area ; I am observing and not intentionally interacting with children... In the background snack is being prepared and served with staff member L.	
Amos: I've got a red car... la, la, la, la, Ah, ah, ah, laughing; I'm asked to join in play with Kirsten S. and Charlotte GG Are you going to do some threading with Esther?	When asked to play I say I am busy writing today – smile but avoid extended eye contact – suggest they might want to do some threading but they move away to play together Esther is absorbed in threading activity; she doesn't speak	Spontaneous vocalisation;
Billy is playing with cars... he vocalises to himself: 'he's crashing into them...can't get out... laughs;		spontaneous vocalisation ?memory
Billy and Amos Humming and singing... C and L ask me to join them. GG: I've got a lot of writing to do today... Billy with cars – mmmm, aah, Amos sings: 'racing car, racing car you're going to go on there.. (indistinct)... but Amos and Billy talk together about the cars... Amos 'Brm, brm, , laughs – more singing and spontaneous screeching weeee..!		Exuberance; spontaneous vocalisation – repetition, describing actions.. spontaneous vocalisation
Deborah/ Kirsten P Shall we go.....? what is your name? 'I love playing... indistinguishable.. 'I got mermaids, I've got mermaids babies ha, ha, ha...' C and L start to sing: Curious George, Curious George;	Esther smiles as L sings 'Curious George'	Songs/rhymes heard/learnt at home; cultural tools for belonging in community; Words known by heart
Deborah (D) and Kirsten P... we've got a yellow cat ? as well When I come to your house I'll see your...unclear? C and L repeat Curious George song Amos hammers in background There e have it... Billy and R. with castle; laughing	Esther smiles as older girls sing	Exuberance and spontaneity; co-operative interaction with others; to be alone and to be able to interact with others Connection – perhaps recognises song/words

C and L sing: 'Enjy Benjy jumps up and down repeats – lots of laughter...		
<p>Billy and Ryan: 'A dinosaur, a dinosaur !'</p> <p>Spontaneous laughter, 'get them in there put them in there;' the boys roar loudly;</p> <p>D and K; I'm going outside now...</p> <p>Christopher has just arrived in nursery; comes over to carpet area – GG hello Christopher ... he's come to put his name on the board;</p> <p>R. There's the skelington... elephant..</p>	<p>Most children leave to and go outside;</p> <p>Christopher leaves carpet; I remain on the carpet (continue recording) and so does Billy who starts building with bricks</p> <p>Esther puts down the 'necklace' she has made – says nothing, smiles and leaves the threading to join Sharon (staff) who is calling 'café open, come and have your snack'</p>	
<p>Billy builds and completes a tower with bricks</p> <p><i>In the background – adult is heard calling for snack</i></p>	<p>Billy is aware I am watching and have my camera – smiles; <i>Photo captures his delight with the success of building tower of bricks – (ref 0695, 0696 and) another shared moment, although neither of us speak – I am present with him and he with me; we have both shut out the noise and bustle of the nursery; I take photo (0697) as he completes capturing the completion and his pleasure</i></p>	<p><i>Billy – self contained; enjoying his own company – earlier welcomed company and collaboration of Amos but contented to initiate own game. Billy seems chuffed with his success – a special moment. Might this be transcendent moment?</i></p>